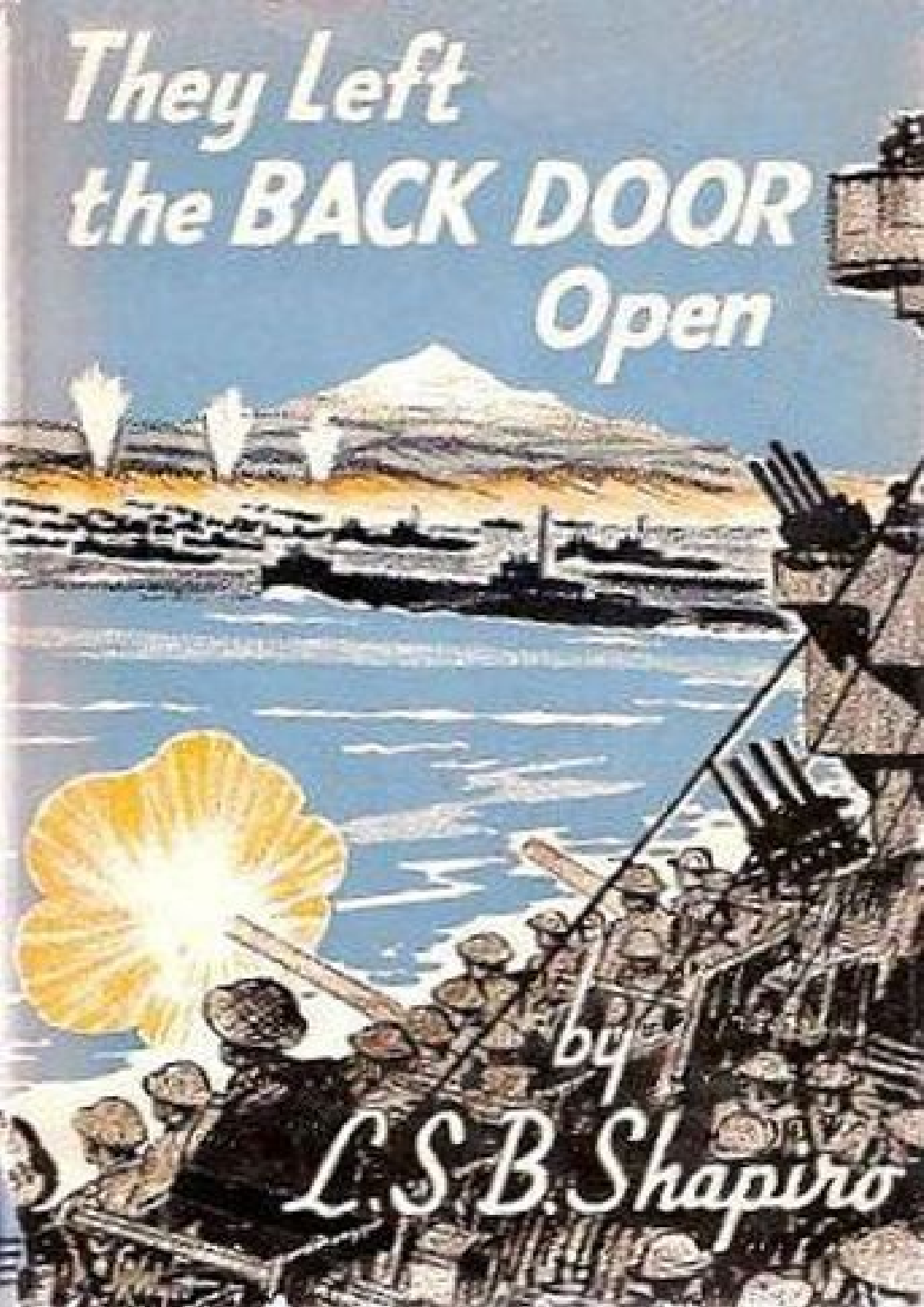
They Left the BACK DOOR Open



by

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They Left *the* Back Door Open

A Chronicle of the Allied Campaign in Sicily and Italy

L. S. B. SHAPIRO

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IN MEMORY OF SANDY MORRISON

It is not my wish to play a dedication piece on the heart-strings of my friends Bill and Happy Morrison. Their only son, Pilot Officer Sandy Morrison, R.C.A.F., was flying a Hurricane in the March skies over Burma when he was killed in combat, and I would not parade their freshly tear-stained memories of him if this were not to high purpose.

This is the stage of the war when we are exhilarated by our superior and still growing resources and by the vision of victory. We think less about individuals and more about armies; less about pilots, more about air power. It is inevitable. Four years of war and death has blunted the sharp edge of concern we felt when we suffered our first casualties. We have bitterly outgrown the sensitive feel for tragedy we developed during twenty-five years of peace.

But we must strive to recapture it; we must make certain that four or more years of war does not leave us psychologically crippled—else we will have lost a proper regard for peace.

The moment war becomes impersonal to us, and our glory in victory more fervent than our grief for the fallen—at that moment we will have established that war is the natural bent of mankind.

It is in elaboration of this point that I dedicate this book to the memory of Sandy Morrison, and for this purpose that I stir, perhaps cruelly, the settled grief of his parents Bill and Happy Morrison.

Not many years ago Bill Morrison was my first editor. On the early trick Sunday afternoons Bill sometimes brought along his boy Sandy. He was a lad in knee pants, under ten, and his crop of sandy hair curled at the ends, much to his disgust because having been brought up as the baby brother in a family of sisters he had a healthy aversion to anything pretty.

It was not long before I moved away on assignment as a roving reporter. But I did not lose track of the Morrisons. On my visits home two or three times a year I always dropped in to see Bill and Happy. Sandy was in high school now, trying hard to lower his voice, playing football and hockey with a skimpy little frame that didn't seem to grow high or wide.

The last time I saw him at home he had reached the gawky age between boyhood and youth, still trying to make his voice sound manly, still abashed by the fate that made him a baby boy in a household of girls. At sixteen a fellow wants to grow up quickly.

"*This generation has a rendezvous with destiny.*"

I heard President Roosevelt utter the words during a 1936 campaign

speech. A fine sentence, I thought; it thrilled you before you could break down its significance.

Three years later, on a misty Sunday morning in New York, I heard Neville Chamberlain's dull voice come over the radio. "We are at war with Germany . . . we will be fighting evil things . . ."

Both events came to my mind on another Sunday—in London, 1941. The reception clerk at the Savoy had phoned to say, "Sergeant-pilot Morrison is here to see you"—and I stood in the hall and watched Sandy limp toward me with the aid of two canes. His left foot was in a cast, the result of a crack-up.

He stopped when he saw me, waved one of his canes, grinned boyishly. Then he hobbled forward eagerly. The ends of his sandy hair curled around his side cap.

"Sergeant-pilot Morrison." I mumbled the words to myself. It didn't seem real that Sandy should be a veteran of air battles. He was a boy—nineteen. At home he would be reprimanded for staying out past midnight. His sisters would make him blush furiously by mentioning he had been seen walking a girl home and swinging her hand along with his.

"This generation has a rendezvous with destiny," I recalled. "We will be fighting evil things . . ."

This generation was Sandy!

He hadn't changed at all. The young are blessed that way. War to them is a wonderful adventure.

Yet Sandy was glad to see someone and something from home. I gave him the chocolates his mother had put in my baggage. He asked eagerly about home, his boyish voice still quavering in its struggle to reach down to mannish levels. He shrugged off his adventures in the sky.

"There's nothing much to talk about," he said. "Tell them not to worry. A fellow can't get hurt if he knows how to handle his kite . . ."

Sandy talked a long time in his diffident, gawky way. War or no war, he had not yet grown up. He was slight and skinny, and he still had the bashful bravado of a boy brought up in a household of girls.

I carried his box of chocolates to the door for him, helped him into a taxi. He waved his canes and grinned as the cab chugged away.

The Middle East and India. The King's commission. And in the no-man's-land of a Burmese wilderness a British patrol found Sandy lying close to the plane in which he had fought and fallen.

Now the war goes our way. We are going to win. Victory will be glorious. There will be peace.

What kind of peace? It depends on those who survive the victory. If they remember the Sandy Morrisons of this war vividly enough, there will be no peace as we have known peace. There will be short shrift and hard justice for

those who foment hate and caress power. There will be righteous anger and eternal vigilance. We will be fighting evil things always—always.

Otherwise Sandy Morrison is doomed to battle forever. And death, not life, will take the blush of youth from his cheeks.

Foreword

THIS IS INTENDED TO BE A book for the United Nations. In it I have discussed the campaigns conducted by British, American and Canadian troops in Sicily and Italy, and I have tried to handle my material with true Allied realism; that is, with frankness for all no less than pride in all. My motivation has been the ideal of full and unselfish co-operation between our forces fighting in the West to high purpose.

Because I am a Canadian, I can do this perhaps with an easier manner than my British or American colleagues. Canada is now a crossroads of the world; it has always been, as Mr. Churchill once put it, the linchpin binding together the two great English-speaking powers. We in Canada have merged the philosophies and inherited some of the qualities of both nations; happily, we have developed the prejudices of neither. The Canadian is at once a North American and a fervent citizen of the British Commonwealth.

My own experience has extended this pattern. After completing my schooling and basic newspaper training in Canada, I spent seven years as a correspondent in the United States, including two years in the White House press room. This was followed by a year in Britain; a campaign with the Eighth Army; and finally accreditation to Lieut.-General Mark Wayne Clark's headquarters of the Fifth Army.

The reader will note that I have written only of what I have seen, and something of what I felt as an eyewitness. This has necessarily made for certain glaring omissions. For instance, because I campaigned with the Eighth Army in Sicily, I have neglected almost completely the role of Lieut.-General Patton and his Seventh United States Army. Similarly, my description of fighting on the Italian mainland is devoted principally to the Salerno operation with hardly a mention of the Eighth Army's important function. In my consideration of the American soldier's attitude toward war, I have based my conclusions on what I saw of him in the Mediterranean theatre. His attitude in the Far Pacific may be entirely different. If I have overlooked Russia, it is because my war experience has not brought me into contact with our magnificent ally. In other words, this book devotes itself to what I have actually seen.

I should like to record my thanks to *The Montreal Gazette*, my employer during the Mediterranean campaign, and to the North American Newspaper

Alliance and *MacLean's Magazine*, my current employers. Despatches to these offices have been used as background material for this book. I must include a note of appreciation for the goodwill of Mr. Alfred Lunt and Miss Lynn Fontanne. They have occupied adjoining rooms to mine in the Savoy Hotel these last few weeks and their forbearance has been remarkable. I am happy to note that the endless clatter of my typewriter, which certainly must have imposed upon their leisure, has not interfered with their magnificent success at the Aldwych Theatre.

LIONEL S. B. SHAPIRO.

LONDON, *February 23, 1944*.

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Summons to a Battlefield

IN THE DARK DAYS BEFORE Alamein changed the shape of the war, the wounded didn't cry. Neither did Quentin Reynolds. War correspondents foregathered from all parts of the world, mostly from America, in London's Savoy Hotel and there we waited with excessive patience for the second front, murmuring hardly a complaint except to growl, "Jeez, Gus, where are those two doubles I ordered ten minutes ago?" During the day we wrote brave stories, dope stories and expense accounts; and on the midnight we transformed the austere resident's lounge of the Savoy into a happy haranguerie incorporating the best features of Bleeck's 41st Street and the powder room of the Embassy Club.

The performance was on at the stroke of midnight when Gus, the night waiter, arrived in the lounge with two pitchers of iced water and his order pad. The programme thereafter was anybody's guess. Sometimes it was utterly unpredictable. One never knew when Larry Rue (*Chicago Tribune*) would stop harassing President Roosevelt and go into a practical demonstration of his baseball prowess as one-half of the battery of Rue and Fugelberg. Or when Jamie MacDonald (*New York Times*) might come in from a bomber station with a breathless recounting of his trip over Berlin a few hours before.

Sometimes Frank Owen and Michael Foot, brilliant editors whose radical minds were harnessed by Lord Beaverbrook to his capitalist press, chanted the Internationale on the urging of several bottles of champagne. This hardly disturbed Hector Bolitho; certainly it did not prevent him from reading benignly to his assembled audience the autobiographical passage which had come to him in bed that very afternoon. Negley Farson might arrive, later, and glance around the room with evil intensity, looking like any Barrymore playing Mephistopheles badly.

Frequently the night manager appeared at the door, then disappeared, his blanched face tweaking with helpless anguish. No wonder. He could remember the day when the only sound heard in this distinguished room was the scratching of a pen at the writing desk and perhaps the heavy breathing of Lord Chislebeak as he addressed himself to his eight-thirty sherry.

Now the world was in chaos and this was the Savoy's Calvary. Only an

Allied offensive in the west could remove the war correspondents from this rollicking halfway house, thus restoring to the lounge the charm of unemployed luxury which is the hallmark of the hotel distingué. I think that the night manager was one with Joseph Stalin in heartfelt passion for a second front.

As the months of 1942 rolled by, Messrs. Roosevelt and Churchill and their combined chiefs of staff conspired to solve the Savoy's problem.

The Alamein offensive took some of the correspondents. The North African assault took more. The mardi gras spirit of the lounge after midnight was withering.

Then one day early in June, 1943, the telephone tinkled in my room. That ended my beachcombing on expense account.

In the next five months I was to know the stench of Sicily and the terror of Salerno; I was to witness the last inglorious days of Italian Fascism and to see lying off the hubcaps of a jeep the ultimate degradation to which Fascism can bring a civilized nation.

During the third week in May, 1942, the battle for Africa ended. The Allied world reacted joyously, but no more joyously than the Canadian First Division. These original Canadian volunteers had been in Britain three years and five months seeking, hoping for, finally praying for a battlefield. Their record was one of frustration. In April, 1940, the division was ordered to recapture Trondheim while there was still a chance to break the German hold on Norway. It boarded ship at a Scottish port, but before the convoy could get under way the operation was cancelled. Early in the following June, the division was once again moved to a British port. This time the forlorn cause was France, and once more the order was rescinded. Dunkerque was too close to its tragic climax. France was gone and a single division could not save it.

Three years and five months! A long time for volunteer soldiers to wait three thousand miles from home. Too long for men who had rushed to recruiting offices in September, 1939, in the first flush of a desire to fight Nazi Germany. Too long, much too long, to spend in the bleak encampments of England. Youths of twenty had become twenty-four; many had married apple-cheeked Sussex girls, reared families with multiple offsprings.

With bitter humour they cracked: The First Division is the only formation in the history of war in which the birthrate is higher than the deathrate.

Now Africa was conquered. And they were engaged in assault exercises and mountain training. The next battlefield must be theirs. Surely the vigil was ended!

It was. During the first week in June tanks and heavy equipment of the division rolled to west British ports for loading on ships.

On Saturday morning, June 12, at eleven-thirty o'clock, my telephone

tinkled. The exact time is unimportant except to me. The bell was summoning me to an experience which was to affect my life so drastically as to be almost fatal.

"Hello, Lionel. This is Eric Gibbs. There's a parcel just arrived for you. Would you come down and pick it up?"

"Thank you. I'll be down in twenty minutes."

My hand clutched the telephone headset long seconds after Gibbs rang off. This was the summons. I knew it. There was the collusion of rumour and premonition. Besides which, Major Gibbs, second in command of the Public Relations Office, Canadian Military Headquarters, was not in the habit of informing me of the arrival of parcels from home.

Fifteen minutes later I was striding down the Strand, across Trafalgar Square where the band of the Scots Guards was playing a noon-hour concert, into the drab building on Cockspur Street.

I walked directly into the office of Lieut.-Colonel Abel, Chief Public Relations officer. Major Gibbs followed me in, closed the door behind him. I heard what I expected to hear.

"You are going on operations," Abel began. He paused to fill his pipe, an old habit of his when he wanted time to think between sentences. "We don't know what kind of operations. They may be only manœuvres. Who knows? Anyway, you leave Monday night. Better take all your equipment with you. And check out of the hotel."

Gibbs was a little more specific. "Be at the station at eight o'clock Monday night. I'll meet you there and tell you where you go. And, for God's sake, don't tell anybody about this. You're just going away for a few days, see? A hell of a lot of security depends on you—to say nothing of your own skin."

The Scots Guards band was still playing when I came out on Trafalgar Square. A June sun glinted on polished brass instruments pumping out a Friml medley. I think it was the "Rose Marie" music. I could not be sure because I stood in a small vacuum of my own making and I was the star of my own little melodrama.

Here were all these people standing in the Square, listening to music, probably on their way home. How drab! I was on the threshold of new adventures, probably thrilling ones. I felt the tingle of superior power. I knew something these people didn't know. When they next read big black headlines in their newspapers, I would be in the midst of the story they read. I might even write that story.

I hardly noticed that the band concert was finished. I moved out of the Square with the crowd, still absorbed with my own exhilaration. There was a note of mystery to add to the symphony swirling within me. I didn't know where we were going. Of course I suspected the Mediterranean. But one never

knew.

In the Savoy I met Hannen Swaffer, his bearing lending majesty to a figure designed for nothing better than a starved vaudevillian.

"How are you, m'boy?" he said. "Anything new?"

Nothing was new, I told Swaff. Same old routine of waiting for something to break—oh, yes, and I was going out of town on Monday for a swing around Canadian camps. This, with an air of bored nonchalance. (Which, as I learned later, didn't fool Swaff!)

Thus I passed the week-end with my secret wrapped up excitingly within me like a Christmas parcel almost coming undone in the arms of a small boy. Here were bursting moments and I was unable to share them with my friends. I could only sift the thoughts that crossed my mind, while I made last-minute preparations for life on the march.

If these are desperate days through which to live, we are offered the crowning compensation of a sense of history. It is real compensation for those who are vivid enough (and fortunate enough) to collect it. In order to do so, one must be at once selfless and the extreme introvert; one must remove oneself from his generation and view this unique and magnificent struggle from the heights of historic perception, and at the same time embrace eagerly the circumstance of having been born to this generation and of having contributed to the shortcomings and emotions which precipitated this climactic drama. We are both spectators and players—every last one of us—and we must be conscious of both roles. What a desolate circumstance it would be if schoolchildren a hundred years from now should know better than we the flavour and the breathlessness of this time.

There are some to whom this war is nothing but blood, tears, toil and sweat. Yet the man who offered only these to Britain in 1940 could, from the vantage point of history, see behind and beyond the shadowed valley. He was both player and spectator in that delicate balance which produces courage for living and hope for life.

I am endowed with no such Churchillian perception. Instead I have a modest substitute, a sort of hammy awareness that I am witnessing a chapter of mankind's story which will be the wonder of those who come after. I will have lived and felt and perhaps been crushed by events a description of which in cold type will tingle the jowls of the reader of tomorrow.

What would one give to have lived through Trafalgar and Waterloo? Or to have marched with General Washington, knowing that the rumble of drums was summoning to life a new and wondrous nation?

These events are flicks on the face of history compared with the grand upheaval through which we are living. Ours is the generation accursed with the heartbreak of violent change; yet—who would remove himself to the

maddening frustration of Victorian existence? The innocent died then, cruelly, wantonly, perhaps in number comparable with today; they were struck down by the diseases of poverty and ignorance. They did not recognize their tormentors, nor was their gruesome passing more than briefly noted by the fine little world of royal courts and middle-class carriages.

Today's ordeal thrums with the overtones of spectacle and poignance and truth. We know at least why we die: and because of this perhaps we may learn how to live. We feel a sullen purpose in this crimson and confusing pattern. (And suddenly, one is chilled. Has this not been said before—in finer terms, by great men, in other wars?)

These considerations contain a degree of consolation and courage, and I put them in a last letter to my mother, hoping my sudden ascent into intellectual acrobatics would serve to inform her of my departure from London to a fighting zone. Then I sent my last expense account to my newspaper, which told my editor nothing because it was no departure from the regular routine.

My zeal for security knew no bounds, proof of which I submit in the fact that I failed to cancel an after-theatre dinner engagement with a mannequin. Our dinner was arranged for a Tuesday night; I left London on the Monday, thus sacrificing a fine and promising amour in the interests of secrecy. In fact, on the Sunday I walked the streets of London rather than remain in the hotel and risk becoming involved in heated discussions on military operations. I was afraid my bursting secret might split at the seams.

Monday, the 14th, was filled with the bustle of departure. Troubles, I found, are about the only thing you can pack in a kitbag. Selecting only essential needs for an extended journey, I found myself buying an extra duffle bag, then salvaging a zipper bag from a previous clipper journey, finally dumping a lot of extra kit in my bedding roll. I struggled into the station looking like John Steinbeck's Mrs. Joad on the move.

The next morning I detrained at a little town and was driven to the concentration area of a Canadian Army Tank Brigade.

Headquarters was situated in an old castle of Hearstian proportions. It was complete with moat, drawbridge and ghost. Inside it was less livable than a second-class stable. The plumbing had been modernized, I guessed, in anticipation of the last visit of Henry VIII, and the chill was so penetrating I had to keep turning in front of the fireplace, as though impaled on a perpendicular spit, in order to keep myself uniformly warm.

The Brigade had been concentrated in the area for a month. Some of its units with tanks had already gone forward to be loaded on LST's (landing ship tank). This is the flat-bottomed type designed by Andrew Higgins of New Orleans for amphibious operations. It is capable of long sea voyages, and when

it runs up on a beach, its square prow opens like a drawbridge so that the tanks can roll off on land.

The last of the tanks went forward while I was still in the castle. I was left there with the brigadier and his staff, and certain infantry, supply and workshop units who were scheduled to travel to Sicily on the headquarters ship, the last to be loaded.

For eleven days, from June 15 to the 26, we remained in the castle. Waiting became the principal discomfort, followed closely by the damp of the castle and the muscular rats which filled the nights with the clamour of their athletics.

Secrecy was rigidly maintained even in the lonely castle. Although most staff officers knew details of the operational plan, no hint was dropped through long nights of conversation, card-playing and modest drinking that Sicily was our destination. Indeed, I began to doubt that we were to assault any part of Italian soil. I pondered the possibilities of Corsica and Salonika.

In order that no hint should be dropped to near-by villagers that operations were pending, I was stripped of my war correspondent's insignia and given three pips denoting a captaincy. Thus I was able to drive to a near-by town one night to see a motion picture. The feature was one currently running in London —"China," starring Loretta Young and Alan Ladd.

Drama is a counterfeit thing. It has to be dressed up to be appreciated. Here was a piece of Hollywood fiction about a handsome American civilian in China advancing to attack a Japanese concentration and it had my heart leaping about my throat. The tension within me was immense as the hero moved stealthily toward the Japanese positions. It did not occur to me until I was walking out of the theatre that I was on the threshold of an adventure certainly as daring, perhaps more thrilling.

Back at the mess, an officer paused in his card-playing to tell me of an accident that evening. A tank was proceeding to the embarkation point; its commander was sitting halfway out of the top turret. As the tank turned a corner, its 75mm. gun struck a signpost. The gun swung round on its turret and decapitated the officer cleanly as though by guillotine.

"Tidying up the tank was a messy job," grumbled the officer as he returned to his card-playing.

This was my first acquaintance with sudden death. There was no reaction within the room, hardly any within me. The movies do this sort of thing much better.

The next morning the brigadier invited me to accompany him on a last inspection of units before embarkation.

"You'll see regiments out there, young man," he said to me at breakfast. "I'm proud of them. They're keen as mustard. They've been here two years waiting to go into action, but we in the tanks have had no morale problem.

We've had our equipment headaches—but that's another story. Our morale has always been first class."

Our cavalcade rumbled over the cobblestones of a town hoary with the architectural cobwebs of history, squirmed through a country road. Emerging from a clump of forest we came into full view of a regiment lined up on the gradual incline of a hill. The men were in full battle kit. A general salute was ordered as the brigadier strode toward the officer commanding the regiment.

The brigadier examined each man from head to foot, prodded pieces of equipment, tugged at belts and buckles. Then he moved back to a position facing the regiment.

"Men," he began, his deep voice booming over the parade-ground, "you have been singularly honoured and privileged to form part of the first armoured formation in the history of Canada to move into active operations against the enemy."

This was the first official word given to the men that they were about to go into action on the battlefield. Smiles broke on some faces; on most there was no visible reaction.

"You have everything," the brigadier went on, "except actual battle experience. That, I am confident, you will learn quickly and effectively. But I want to sound a note of caution. Feel your way at first. Do not move in headlong no matter how great the temptation. Be cautious. Be careful at first. In short, make haste slowly.

"I wish the best of luck to each and every one of you. May God see fit to give His blessing to your efforts. Thank you."

I stood beside the brigadier at the march-past and I watched for reactions in the faces of these youngsters who three years ago were clerks and farmers and shopkeepers in Canada. I was disappointed. There was none.

Back at the mess I mentioned this observation to the padre, a young Roman Catholic priest from a small Ontario town.

"I find them no different now than they were before they heard the news," he said. "My services are no better attended. I suppose they're no longer men, as we know men. They're good soldiers. A pity, isn't it?"

Life at the castle had become almost unbearably dull. The whole of the Brigade, except the headquarters squad, had already gone forward to transports; the clusters of Nissen huts surrounding the castle were deserted, the roar and clamour of tanks uncomfortably absent. Nothing looks so enthusiastically lived in as a Nissen village, and nothing so bare and desolate as one recently vacated.

Then on Saturday, June 26, it happened.

"We move tonight."

Our card-playing in late afternoon was broken up by this quietly spoken

remark. It was uttered by the brigade major as he entered the officers' mess.

"A vehicle will pick up your bedrolls at midnight," he added. "You will be ready to move an hour later. Dress order for the journey will be full webbing, big and small pack, and tin hat."

Cards were tossed on the table. We raced to our quarters to get our gear in travelling shape. Boredom was routed as the halls of the castle echoed with scuffling and laughing and shouting. The two officers whose room I shared rolled wrestling on the floor out of sheer exhilaration.

Our last packs were being neatly crammed when the door of our room was flung open and the quartermaster sergeant staggered in, sagging under the weight of a towering armful of equipment. He dropped it on the floor.

"What's that?" we shouted almost in unison.

"Tropical kit," said the sergeant—and he walked out.

So it was. Two khaki drill shirts, two shorts, two long trousers for each man. Also a mosquito net, tent poles, sun goggles, knee length socks and short puttees. We groaned as we proceeded to rearrange our packing to include the new equipment.

"Well," one of my roommates mumbled, "that eliminates Murmansk."

Dusk lingered long on this June night. It was not until very late that darkness descended upon the turrets of the castle. A convoy of vehicles moved out of the courtyard, edged through the deserted Nissen village and, reaching the highway, leaped through the darkness toward the railway station of a near-by town.

Some three hundred men, last of the headquarters squadron, were lined up on the station platform beside the blacked-out train. Sergeants called the roll, their voices echoing over the sleeping town below the station platform. It was a moonless night and the faint glint of starlight played on the helmets of the troops.

On orders, the officers moved up the platform to where the first coaches awaited. The men remained, standing easy, along the lower length of the train. The wind was sharp, the night dark, and we waited. These were long minutes. Webbing supporting big and small packs strained at my shoulders. The journey into battle awaited the order of the officer commanding.

I glanced at the luminous dial of my wrist watch. It showed two-fifteen a.m. In New York it was eight-fifteen on a Saturday night. People at home were at dinner. Or on their way downtown to the movies, their girl friends clinging to their arms. The cocktail bars were filled with clinking and conversation. I thought of the Stork Club and my friends gathering at the big table in the far corner of the room; of the theatre orchestras warming up in the pit before the curtain's rise. I thought of California and the pool at the Beverly Hills Hotel. It was four-fifteen in the afternoon there, probably bright sunshine

and drinks in tall frosted glasses. I thought of these things with unashamed sentimentality, but I did not long for them. My place in the drama of our time was too precious. I was privileged, I thought. . . .

Down the line the waiting men began to sing, with exaggerated pathos, "Sweet Adeline."

The tune was cut short by a crisp order—"Board train! The first four compartments are reserved for officers. Quickly, men, quickly!"

We were off to the wars.

A few hours later the screech of brakes disturbed the easy rhythm of wheels on rails and broke the doze into which I had fallen. Someone lifted the black-out shade and the compartment was filled with early morning light. We stretched ourselves, carefully because there was a scarcity of space. Six of us were in the compartment and we lay in a bower of packs, big and small, haversacks, binoculars, coats, revolvers and tommy-guns.

The train was coming to a stop.

Doors were flung open by military police and Royal Marines. Wearily we donned the webbing and the packs. On the platform the men were lined up. In a few moments we marched a short distance to a tender.

In the bay a flotilla of troop transports floated at anchor. Handsome ships they were, some easily recognizable despite their drab colouring. Not far away were ships of the Royal Navy, destroyers, cruisers and aircraft-carriers. Our tender steamed into deep water, passed dozens of ships, and finally coddled by the side of a transport I recognized as being formerly in the Atlantic run. We scrambled aboard.

The steward of the stateroom I shared with two other officers helped us with our baggage. "How long a voyage have we in prospect?" I asked, fishing gingerly for information.

"That all depends where we're going, sir," he replied. "Personally, I have no idea."

We weighed anchor toward dusk on a placid day late in June and sailed under the magnificent patronage of the biggest and reddest sun I have ever seen. Through the protective boom our convoy of ocean liners moved in single file. These were all fast ships. The slower LST's carrying our tanks sailed before us.

Darkness closed in while we were still in sheltered waters, and we retired to a carefree sleep. The next morning we were in open sea. The vista from the boat deck was both proud and terrifying. Our group of ocean liners ploughed through a summer sea which rippled no more ardently than the average lake. Etched against the horizon in every direction steamed British and American destroyers, the legs, eyes and arms of this solid body of great ships. Closer in were bigger warships of the Royal Navy, their glinting guns making

communion with the morning sky. And overhead aircraft of Coastal Command circled around, giving us a feeling of easy confidence.

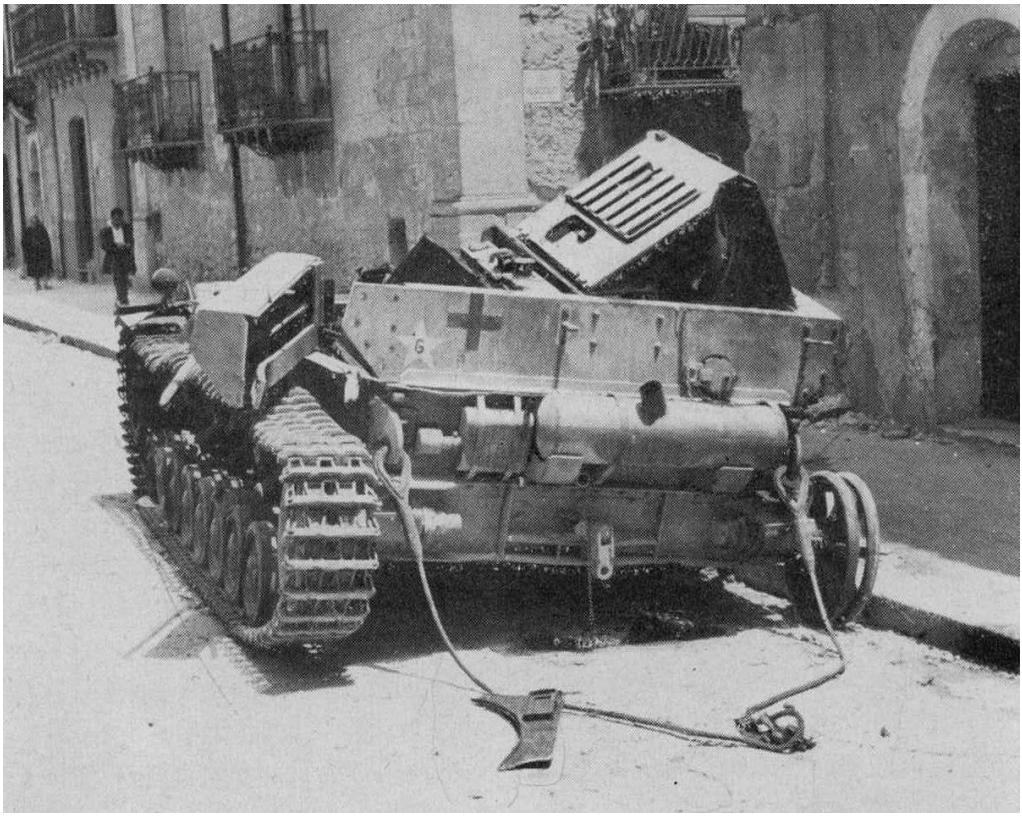
As I looked upon this magnificent panorama I knew at once the supreme purpose of sea power in a world war. In these ships a fully equipped army was sailing safely and confidently on a split-minute schedule toward a point of our own choosing. We were circling the Fortress Europe, reserving the oceans, greatest of all highways, for our exclusive use and denying it to the enemy. Our ships cut serenely across a painted ocean. In the distance the destroyers raced proud and impudent like thoroughbred terriers. This was our highway. So long as we could use it and the enemy could not, we might fall upon him at any point of his long coastline. We could wield the initiative and strangle him with it.

The ship's permanent regimental sergeant-major, a weatherbeaten veteran of 1914, stood beside me as I scanned the scene through binoculars.

"You've got to 'and it to the Navy, sir," he grunted. "I've been on transports for three years now. Travelled most everywhere. Around the Cape, Suez, Malta, India, Alex—yes, and Greece. The Navy took me there and brought me back. You've got to 'and it to 'em. They do the job every time. The army 'asn't been so 'andy at times. But the Navy they never fails. Them blokes is good."

Good they are. I was destined to learn just how good. Before my odyssey in the Mediterranean was ended, they were to save my life and tens of thousands of others, and to turn this war's threatening Gallipoli into the triumph of Salerno.

Above: “I knew at once the supreme purpose of sea power in a world war.” Part of the assault convoy sailing to Sicily.



Above: A demonstration of the firepower of American Sherman tanks, used by the Eighth Army in Sicily. A single shot from a Sherman at point-blank range severed the turret from this German Mark IV.

2
Spanish Interlude

THIS IS THE STORY OF A MAN who went out and did something about freedom and justice and decency. He did not rest his foot on a rail and pound the words into a mahogany bar until his fist shook the tumblers all along the line. Nor did he decry Fascism from a platform and rest content that he had done his duty by arousing an audience of liberals and intellectuals. He did not write brave and biting articles in the press to prod the conscience of mankind. He clenched his bare young hands and moved in wrath toward the enemies of freedom and justice and decency.

A simple fellow, to be sure. I doubt that he knew the meaning of Fascism; to him it was probably a word in a newspaper headline. Certainly he never listened to a speech in which a politician intoned eloquently the glories of democracy. He was not well educated. In his intellectual gawkishness he only knew right from wrong, and his awareness of wrong automatically set him in motion toward correcting what seemed to him a patently ridiculous situation. His utter simplicity was his great strength. The mental acrobatics which ponder ways and means and compromise were grossly lacking in him.

But his is a story of our world in the middle nineteen-thirties. In it are caught up the frustration, deceit and cowardice of that time, the hypnosis which gripped us as we watched Fascism coil for the kill and also the Quixotic courage of our awakening. It is a story both brave and anguished; full of the greatness of small men and the smallness of great nations.

I came by the story long before we moved into battle. It was related to me on the deck of our troopship bound for Sicily.

On a dark and moonless night in July our convoy passed through the Straits of Gibraltar. Proud and triumphant, their guns raised high toward the dark skies as though in celebration, two destroyers of our escort led us into the narrow channel where the Mediterranean makes confluence with the Atlantic.

From the jet-black deck of our troopship I scanned the south shore. Less than a mile to our starboard the lights of Tangier lay scattered beyond the rocky coast. They were the first night lights many of us had seen for more than a year; we were transfixed by them. Across the Straits on the European side, a few lights flickered in the hills. This was Algeciras.

On the dark water between, the bulky shadows of our blacked-out ships moved slowly through the narrow channel. These are tricky waters and our huge vessels moved dangerously close one upon the other. It seemed our propellers were barely turning. Like masked creatures we crept stealthily into the Mediterranean, passing the lights of the Spanish mainland with a breathless quiet and almost brushing the base of Gibraltar without a gesture of recognition. Then into the open waters of the inland sea.

The next morning was sunswept and dazzling. After the murky waters of the Atlantic the Mediterranean appeared a deep and decorative blue. Our convoy resumed operational formation and we sailed—gaily it seemed—at full speed. The mountain peaks off the Spanish coast could be seen rising above the ground haze. I scanned these from the boat deck, and I wondered how many German agents stood on those peaks scanning us, counting our ships, examining through powerful binoculars the particulars of our convoy and reporting back to Berlin.

Leaning on the rail beside me was Captain John Donaldson of the Brigade staff. He was also examining the hills of Spain with a curious intensity. Captain Donaldson was a typical Canadian volunteer—tall, lean of body and broad of shoulder, handsome in a healthy way. I did not know much about him except that he came from a town near Regina and before joining the army in 1940 he was an engineer working for the Saskatchewan provincial government.

"That's where it started, John," I said. "Beyond those hills. I imagine if we had beaten Fascism there seven years ago, we wouldn't be going to Italy now. At least not to fight."

John was silent a long time. The hills seemed to hypnotize him. He blinked in the morning sun and continued to examine the distant peaks.

"I've got a score to settle," he said, "beyond those hills. I had a brother there. He fought for the Loyalists."

I was surprised. Not because a Canadian should have fought with the Loyalists—there were hundreds in the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion—but because one of them should have been John's brother. It was a far cry from a western Canadian homestead to a Spanish battlefront. And John did not strike me as a militant liberal. He was a typical young Canadian, rather comfortable and content, inclined to be cold toward radical movements.

We leaned on the rail and watched the Spanish hills recede into the haze as our convoy moved deeper into the Mediterranean. And quietly, bitterly, John related the story.

It started in 1919 when hearty, thick-set George Donaldson returned from the Great War to his working-class home in the suburbs of Glasgow. He had left home as a private in 1914, fought for four years in France, and returned

home as a private. That was typical of George Donaldson. He had neither ambition nor airs. He was a Scottish working man—a stoker by trade—and it did not surprise his impoverished wife that George, having fought through all the campaigns of the western front, should not have collected so much as a single stripe on his sleeve.

Mrs. Donaldson wouldn't have minded—although keeping a roof over the heads of her three children and herself was no easy matter on a private's allowance—if George had come back the same, sound, stolid man he went away. He was not. A hacking cough convulsed his thick frame and the strength developed in a lifetime of hard labour was no longer within him. Mustard gas and the damp of the Flanders winters had robbed him of the cheerful vigour which once enabled him to earn rent and food money tending the power furnace in the dungeon of a Glasgow factory.

George went back to work. But Mrs. Donaldson knew it could not be for long. Hers was a gamble with time, a race between George's failing strength and the upbringing of her three children. She knew she must lose. The children were still under ten. And although George gave the impression of cheerfulness when he came home each night, she knew with a sure instinct that the time had come for the Donaldson family to make decisions. She could no more watch George die slowly in the stoke-hole of a factory than she relished the prospect of her three children growing up in the grey sadness of a Glasgow slum. She knew there must be somewhere a brighter place to live and a better prospect for her children.

So it came to pass that George, his wife and their three children sailed one day out of the mists of the Clyde. Their destination was Canada and the windswept spaces of the west, their journey aided by the anxiety of the Canadian government to people the plains between Winnipeg and the Pacific.

They settled in a little town near Regina. Here George died. Mrs. Donaldson buried him and she was content at least that he had known on his death-bed the freshness of the western wind and the promise it held for his children.

Within the tidy necessity of the living Mrs. Donaldson eked out of the Canadian west, the children had a wholesome upbringing. Betty was the eldest; then came Bill and John. Those who knew the Donaldsons when they first arrived from Glasgow could trace the impulses of heredity as the children matured into youth. Betty and John were keen, ambitious, determined to raise their station in life. Within them was the fierce purpose of their mother when she collected her brood and her ailing husband and broke away from the Glasgow slums.

Betty trained herself for a business position; thereafter lost no time in finding herself a husband and a home. John worked his way through the

University, thereafter took a government position as an engineer. When this war broke out he easily obtained a lieutenant's commission, soon became a captain. But I am running ahead of my story . . .

Bill was much like his father. He grew to young manhood with the same stolid cheerfulness, the same honest simplicity that marked the life and death of Stoker George.

In this tale we are concerned mainly with Bill Donaldson.

Bill was never much. In his youth he talked little and laughed a lot. He went to school grudgingly and resisted effectively the imposition upon his mind of anything more than the fundamentals of literacy. His mother looked upon him with chagrin not unmixed with affection because Bill was in almost all respects Stoker George the younger. He displayed the same contentment with almost nothing of the world's goods, and he possessed the same honesty of temperament which had made George's love the only clean and grand experience she had known in the Glasgow slums.

While Betty and John studied and worked, widening their spheres in the community, Bill plodded through youth with heavy tread. He earned his living by sweat, working at any job which happened along requiring a pair of hands and a strong body. He was not a child of the new world, his mother used to say. He still belonged to Glasgow, to the forlorn masses, wanting nothing more than a job, a bed, porridge in the morning and fish and chips at night. In the cacaphony of the growing Donaldson family, Bill played the bass drum, always throwing in a fundamental note, never aspiring to be leader of anything.

Bill was old country in more ways than one. Although his recollections of Scotland were dimmer than those of his brother and sister, the hold of Britain upon his imagination was stronger. He was like Stoker George, who went to the recruiting offices on August 4, 1914. Britain first and forever was his motto.

The blind and desperate patriotism of her people is Britain's main strength, and Bill had this in fullest measure. His dullish mind rarely glowed, save when the subject of homeland was raised. He could not abide young Canadian intellectuals to whom the British connection was merely a fortunate political and economic arrangement. To him Britain was a religion and the Empire the greatest power for freedom and decency on the face of the earth. He could not argue the point; he merely believed it with the immense passion of his simple nature.

Thus Bill grew from youth into manhood, loved by his family, ignored by his community; he was content with the one as he was oblivious of the other. He didn't demand much from life and that's what he was getting. He was happy in an ox-like way, though even his capacity for happiness was limited

by the narrowness of his desires.

In 1935, when Bill was twenty-two, a great poverty swept the Canadian west. Farm prices fell disastrously. Grain bulged elevators all over the prairies; it was piled in mountains by railway sidings. While Europe's masses seethed for want of adequate bread, Canadian wheat withered for want of economic power to move it. The west was gravely stricken.

It was characteristic of Bill that he declined to buck the economic storm. His mother was cared for, thanks to the superior ambition of his brother and sister; so Bill decided to become a soldier. This was an entirely logical move for him. There was security in being a private soldier in the permanent army; there was no future, but that too was quite all right with Bill. Above all, he would be a British soldier. That meant a lot to him.

At Regina Bill caught the transcontinental. He sat in a coach for three days and three nights. Reaching Montreal he moved to the dockyards, hired on a freighter as a deck-hand. Two weeks later he was in Liverpool. And the next day he enrolled for a six-year hitch as a private in the British Army.

Bill was a good soldier and a happy one. His letters to Betty breathed with contentment. The hard routine of Britain's permanent army patterned Bill's simple tastes and his pride in wearing the King's uniform was as great as his pleasure in rediscovering the land he only faintly remembered as a child.

He was like a baby in fairyland. On his first leave he went to London—of course! He arrived in the capital on a foggy October night and, as he wrote Betty, he was so excited he could not sleep. He sat all night at the window of his Jermyn Street hotel and revelled in the anticipation of the dawn which would unfold to him the heart of the Empire, its ancient history and its continuing glory.

As the first streaks of grey daubed the rooftops of Lower Regent Street, Bill was dressed and ready. He strode across Waterloo Place, and through Admiralty Arch, pausing in the misty light to peer at Nelson's monument. Then he swung down the Mall and feasted his eyes on Buckingham Palace. Thence to Westminster and up Parliament Street where stood the Cenotaph. Here he stopped. He was alone in the street, save for an early morning bus rumbling past. But in his mind's eye the scene was invested with silent crowds and in a little clearing before the Cenotaph he pictured King George V standing slightly in front of the four Princes. This was his most familiar London setting; he had seen it so many times in newspapers and movies. Now he was here. And the monument was so plain, nothing on it but the words, "The Glorious Dead." Bill liked that. It made him glad that he was British.

The city awakened to the day's work while Bill leaned on the sidewall of Westminster Bridge watching the Thames flow past the Commons. It was all just as he expected to find it. In fact, Bill had an uncanny feeling he had been

here before; the scenes of glory and tradition fitted too well into the grooves of his imagination. Not for him was the exhilaration of the sightseer gawking for the first time at old world history. These scenes were part of him; he felt a deep satisfaction, a vibrant affinity, a sense of homecoming.

"You know what Mom used to say," he wrote to Betty. "I'm old country. I guess she's right."

If Britain did nothing else for Bill, it awakened in him an urge for writing down his thoughts. Perhaps this was a result of the double impact stemming from the spell of England on his prairie-nurtured mind and a stubbornly unspoken lonesomeness. He wrote voluminous letters on barracks paper and, except for friendly notes at Christmas and Easter, he sent them all to Betty. He admired Betty—always had—and she loved him with the fierce devotion of a worldly woman for her simple and kindly brother.

Reading his letters, the Donaldson family was content that Bill had at last found his niche in life. It was not expected he would ever be anything more than a private—perhaps, with luck, a lance-corporal—because Bill, as his mother constantly reminded Betty, was too much like his father. At least, Bill would have a healthy life. Not like Stoker George who baked at the hole of a furnace most of his days. Bill would travel. His latest letter said they were training for service in India and he was ecstatic over the prospect. "Imagine it. India!" he wrote. "What an Empire! It's wonderful to be British."

Of course, Mrs. Donaldson used to say, being a soldier Bill might have to fight some day and that's dangerous. But this was hardly possible. Mr. Baldwin was such a sensible man and so was Mr. Chamberlain. They were settling things by diplomacy, like the Italian business in Ethiopia, and besides, Britain simply couldn't afford to fight. No country could. Bill, she mused, was safe enough in the army.

Thus passed the spring of 1930.

Training hard for the promised Indian tour of duty, Bill hardly noticed the headlines in the newspapers of July 20. If he did, he made no mention of it in his letters. A revolution had broken out in Spain when General Francisco Franco moved across the Straits from Spanish Morocco to attack the Republican government in Madrid.

Not only was India on his mind, but Bill had begun to mention often a girl in Birmingham. This disturbed Mrs. Donaldson because Bill's diffident description of her was not entirely complimentary. She worked in a steelwares factory for two pounds a week, of which she sent one pound home to Leicester. Her father lived on the dole with five small, motherless children. Although she was only eighteen, she had cooked and kept house for the family since she was twelve. Her father beat her regularly—because he was depressed, she said—so one day when she was seventeen she ran away to

Birmingham. “She’s pale and thin,” Bill wrote, “but she’s neat and her hair is blonde, real blonde, and piled up on top of her head.”

“Isn’t that Bill to the minute,” said Mrs. Donaldson, looking up from the letter. “She’s pale and thin but she’s neat. And living on one pound a week. Bill would go and lose his heart to her. Isn’t it just as easy to fall in love with a substantial girl?”

In October Bill wrote that she was coughing badly and that the doctor said one of her lungs was infected. “She won’t quit work,” he wrote, “because the county only gives her father nineteen shillings a week for himself and the five kids. I guess I’ll marry her as soon as the army lets me to get her out of that factory. Also because I think she’s fine.”

Bill didn’t marry the girl. In December she died. Bill visited her family in Leicester after the funeral and he wrote home bitterly about the plight of the kids and the hopelessness of their father.

It is not quite clear how Bill came to develop an anguished interest in the Spanish civil war. Probably a combination of events rather than a single incident drew him to ponder, in his simple, puzzled manner, the plight of the Spanish people. Certainly there is no record that he acquired left-wing friends, or that the British Army furnished him a liberal education in European politics.

His brief and tragic romance may have aroused in him an active indignation he never before felt. Perhaps the persecution of Spain’s working-class families made communion with an overtone still sounding in his mind as he came away from the Leicester funeral. Whatever the cause, his letters to Betty during January and February of 1937 made frequent references to the Iberian conflict. Neither astute nor scholarly were these commentaries.

“It’s not right, Betty, it’s not fair,” was his most frequent complaint. Once in the heat of his feeling, he bethought himself a longer sequence, “The government was elected by the people. It was their government. What does this man Franco want?”

At home, Betty and the family were mildly amused and not a little amazed by Bill’s sprawling attempts to lift himself to intellectual heights of discussion. But there was a deadly serious note to Bill’s adoption of the Spanish cause. Thick, honest men come hard to understanding; yet when truth finally seeps into their minds and their hearts, they are seared by a clean passion not given to others who have devoted their lives to the acquisition of cleverness.

At first Bill refused to allow the Spanish situation to compromise his faith in Britain. “It’s just a matter of time,” he wrote. “We’ll never let Franco win. Our army will go in sooner or later and polish Franco off. The British will never let this thing go on in their backyard. I hope we go to Spain instead of India. Anyway, I’ve been hearing rumours.”

A lilt of hope came into Bill’s letters that summer as Loyalist armies swept

Mussolini's expeditionary legions from the fields of Guadalajara. He had a renewal of faith in the outcome of the struggle, and deceived by his own blind reliance in the righteousness of British policy, he attributed the brighter outlook to what he believed was secret British aid.

The truth came to him slowly during the autumn and winter months of 1937. His letters became increasingly anguished, not only because the Loyalists were losing battle after battle but also because disillusion was gnawing at his deep-seated faith in his country.

"Why don't they send us?" he would write over and over again. "The government is asleep. Aren't the Spanish people as deserving as the Belgians? We could save them so easily." Then in a burst of simple passion: "I was brought up to believe that right always triumphs in the end. What if it doesn't? What if evil is the winner? What happens to everything we know and believe? . . . I just can't think."

The bitter trend of Bill's letters continued into February, 1938. Toward the end of that month, the Donaldson family was chilled by a short note received by Betty. "My regiment has been ordered to proceed to India. I am on two weeks' embarkation leave. What do you think of it? India instead of Spain! I don't think I'll be able to serve there, so far away from everything. Maybe something will happen before I leave. The British have always done their duty well, even if the government won't. God bless you all. Bill."

A month later the British Army posted the name of a deserter: Private William Donaldson.

Desertion is serious enough an offense; desertion to avoid embarkation for foreign service is not much less serious than treason. To Bill, revelling in his British uniform and in the daydreams of his youthful exuberance for the homeland, the decision must have been filled with torture—the torture of doubt, not of fear.

Thereafter Betty received two letters from him. One was from Hendaye on the French side of the Franco-Spanish border, the other from Madrid.

At Hendaye he was apparently resolving his doubts. "Tomorrow I will be across the border," he wrote. "I am satisfied that I am doing what I feel I should do. I am sorry if Mom feels I have brought shame to the family. Please try and explain to her that I have not. I am not going to fight for Spain; I am going to fight for Britain, really. If Britain won't do the job, some of us who are British must. Some day Mom will understand."

A month later came the letter from Madrid. It had a lighter tone. "I am living in an old school. It looks like an abandoned grain elevator now taken over by rats. They don't seem to mind us at all. Damn friendly of 'em! You'd never guess why I have been kept here in Madrid for so long. No kidding, I'm waiting for a rifle. They can't send me to the front until I've got a gun. That'll

give you some idea of what the people here are up against. A fellow coming out of the line hands his gun to the fellow going in. However, they're fighting against an Italian division north of here and we expect to have plenty of Italian rifles any day now. Well, so long. Bill."

That was the last letter received from him.

The Fascist shadow broadened and lengthened over Spain during the latter half of 1938, and a corner of it darkened the Donaldson household in Canada. Betty's frantic letters remained unanswered and with each Franco victory the gloom at home became more ominous.

"If only Bill had joined up with the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion or the Abraham Lincoln brigade or some other English-speaking unit," Betty said, "we might know what was happening to him. But that's Bill all over. Never arranges anything. If he had to fight for Spain, why couldn't he do it properly? No, not Bill. Like a great big ox, he just goes up and begins fighting. I don't know what to do. I've tried to reach him every way. No one seems to know about him."

Mrs. Donaldson shook her head. "I can't understand how Bill could ever have decided to go to Spain. His father, bless his soul, was patriotic but he didn't go around looking for wars that weren't his own. I just don't know what got into the boy."

The Franco rack turned hard on Spain during the following winter, and in the spring of 1939 the breath of resistance was running out. German, Italian and Spanish regulars, black troops of the Spanish African regiments, equipped by Krupp and Junkers and Messerschmidt smashed down on the people's armies from the west and the north. Weary volunteers trudged back to Hendaye and other French border towns; beaten, starved and embittered they were, many wounded, some dying.

On March 28, 1939, following the rout and slaughter of Loyalist battalions on the plains of Aragon, the end came. Human endurance had reached its last tortured moment and then was no more. Generalissimo Francisco Franco adjusted his most striking sash and made a triumphal entry into Madrid.

The hope that fled the hearts of the Spanish people on that day remained stubbornly in the Donaldson household. There were thousands of Loyalist troops in the concentration camps of southern France. More thousands lay in Spanish prisons. Perhaps Bill was among those forlorn warriors.

Betty appealed to an organization known as Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion with headquarters in Winnipeg. In June of that year she received a reply. Because Bill was not a member of the Canadian unit, no definite information was available. But a report was received that he had fallen in the last retreat from Aragon.

On September 3, 1939, the British people finally learned the true nature of

the Spanish tragedy. Now they were part of the pattern. The lesson came to them from the awkward lips of Neville Chamberlain at eleven a.m. on that Sunday morning, the same Neville Chamberlain who, sitting these years in the enlightened atmosphere of No. 10 Downing Street, failed to share the awareness instinctive in that thick-set, dullish youth called Bill Donaldson.

The Canadian Parliament declared war on Germany seven days later. And John Donaldson, Bill's younger brother, joined his university O.T.C. to train as an officer.

It is one of the weaknesses of our war effort and one of the dangers of the post-war period that men will fight for their country more readily than for the ideals which made their country beloved to them. For Mrs. Donaldson it was only natural and fitting that her remaining son should go to war. At the same time her grief for Bill was anguished by the circumstance that she could not understand why he should have been in Spain at all.

John drew his commission as a lieutenant and sailed to Britain with an early Canadian contingent. He had a lively intelligence, an attractive manner and a fine education. He got along well in the army. Soon after his arrival in England he attained his captaincy and became adjutant of his battalion.

One day, late in 1940, he received a letter from Betty. It read: "I have news of Bill. Just this morning the Mackenzie-Papineau people wrote that Bill was wounded and spent many months in hospitals in Spain and the south of France. This news comes from Canadian wounded just repatriated from France. They say Bill suffered ugly wounds on the left side of his body and face, that he was discharged from hospital still an invalid, and that he is back somewhere in England. Mom is frantic. Do try to find him."

John was beset by doubts. His first reaction was to disbelieve the story that Bill might be alive. If Bill were, surely he would have written home! Then again, John thought, Bill was still, in the eyes of the British Army, a deserter with a heavy prison sentence awaiting him. Even this, though, should not have prevented him from getting secretly in touch with the family. No, John thought, he must be dead. Then hope argued again. Perhaps Bill was so cruelly crippled he felt it best to disappear into a world of his own.

These considerations swirled within John as he moved about London on a seven-day leave. The city was in turmoil. Each night the underground shelters were jammed with weary people; each morning the streets were filled with rubble and shattered glass and crisscrossed with hose-lines. This was the full flower of the Guernica experiment, and John began to know the simple truth of his brother's passion. "I am not going to fight for Spain; I am going to fight for Britain, really," he recalled from Bill's letters.

At Communist headquarters in London there was no hope. The Party had never heard of Bill Donaldson. John was referred to an organization called

Friends of Republican Spain. Here, a thin man with a haggard, deeply-lined face received John and nodded slowly as the story was unfolded.

"Yes," he said sadly. "I know of your brother. He died on the field at Aragon. He was a magnificent fighter."

If hope is but a flicker, there is no great shock when it is snuffed out. There is often relief in decision no matter how tragic. John mumbled his thanks and walked from the room. His search was ended. Aimlessly he trudged London's streets on this lowering November afternoon; suddenly his leave had become bereft of purpose and he was just another soldier on a holiday in a strange city. He traversed the shabby turnings of Aldgate, wondering how he might spend the rest of the evening. His first inclination was to make for Victoria Station and return to camp where he had friends to talk to and a useful job to command his energies. He dismissed this idea almost the moment it entered his mind; after all, a seven-day leave was too precious to pass up. He thought of a club on the Haymarket where Canadians congregated. It had a good bar. But this, too, was foreign to his mood. Perhaps he had better go to his hotel and write a letter to Betty.

Darkness was falling fast over the frowsy, smoke-stained streets when John came across a queue shuffling into the underground shelters for the night. Many of the hollow-eyed men held babies. The women carried blankets and greasy parcels of food and like sheep dogs herded unhappy children before them. The queue moved slowly and those in the street glanced anxiously at the sky, then shouted impatiently toward the head of the line. The crowd pushed forward. Children cried. Women snapped at one another like fishwives.

John watched this bedraggled procession disappear into the mouth of the underground. This was Britain, he thought; no longer proud, still defiant, but no longer supreme master of her destiny. He was glad Bill was not here to see it—Bill to whom Britain was a religion and London the grand arbiter of mankind's ills. As John watched London cower under the night skies he felt somehow that Bill's fate was not altogether without pattern or order. He had an idea Bill was one of the last of the great Britons.

The bombs fell almost simultaneously with siren's howl. A piercing whistle in violent crescendo assailed John's ears, and he flattened himself on the pavement, burrowing close to a brick wall and throwing his arms around the back of his head. An explosion convulsed the pavement. John lay motionless for a few moments; then hearing the shouts of men and the patter of feet, he lifted his head and looked around. A near-by fire bathed the street with a pink glow. Steel-helmeted men were running into the next turning. From the shadows of doorways dark figures were racing frantically to the underground entrance. John scrambled to his feet and followed them down dimly-lit stairs until the lowest level was reached.

Here were the people of Aldgate shuffling about in a confused babel of crying babies and excitable conversation, of smells and sighing and hysterical laughter. The explosions above were now dull thumps like the sound of a distant bass drum.

John squeezed through to the far end of the platform and found a square foot of sitting space between a gaunt, fear-stricken woman and a one-legged young man. The latter picked up his crutch to make room for John.

"How do you know when the raid is over? Do they tell you?" John asked.

The crippled youth smiled. "Don't worry, brother. It won't be over till morning. No use climbing all those stairs. You'll just have to come back."

"But I've got to get down to Piccadilly."

"Why?" said the youth. "It's even worse down there."

John shrugged his shoulders, pulled his cap over his eyes and tried to doze.

"This your first raid, Canada?"

John nodded. The crippled youth was clear-eyed and handsome in a dark, stubby way. John figured he was a Jew.

"Does this happen every night in London?"

"Oh, they've been giving us a packet most every night for three months now," the youth said. Then, as an afterthought: "I envy you that uniform, brother. At least you'll be able to go after them. I won't—any more. They've fixed me for fair." He patted his crutch.

"Bombs?"

"No. Bullets."

"France?"

"No. Spain."

John swallowed the words that came to his lips. Bill was a closed chapter and he would not reopen it. He pulled his cap over his eyes and simulated sleep. The air was putrid and the woman on his left kept sniffling and talking to herself.

"Why did you go to Spain?" John asked haltingly.

The youth's shrill laughter sang bell-like over the babel. "Because, you silly ass, I wanted to fight them while we still had a chance to beat them. It was better than this, I'll tell you, a lot better. Is this a way to fight the bastards? Naah! Climbing into holes like a lot of rabbits! Some of us didn't wait like a lot of idiots I know strutting around in their fancy uniforms and singing 'Rule Brittania'—but don't take this personally, brother . . ."

"It's okay," said John. "My brother fought there, too."

"In Spain?"

"Yes. Spain."

"Mackenzie-Papineau bunch?"

"No. He went by himself."

"Oh. What's his name?"

"Bill Donaldson."

"Bill Donaldson . . . Hmm . . . So you're his brother. That's nice . . . What's he doing now?"

"He was killed."

"Where? Here?"

"No. In Spain."

"Did you say Bill Donaldson? . . . Stocky little Canadian? . . . The wires are crossed somewhere, brother. He was in hospital with me."

"Did you know him? What hospital?"

"No, I didn't know him. But he was there all right—in a place near Bordeaux. There were hundreds of us there. I couldn't get around on account of my leg. But Bill Donaldson was in the gang. I heard them mention him a lot. Machine-gun bullets in his left side and shrapnel in his face. But he made the grade. He left the hospital before I did."

"Did he go back to Spain?"

"Of course not. This was June, 1939. It was all over . . ."

The next morning John went to Scotland Yard. A man whose manners were excruciatingly polite listened to the story almost from the very beginning. Then he disappeared into a file room, was away an endless time, perhaps half an hour. When he returned he carried a card in his hand.

"There is very little we can do," he said. "Not the way London is today. This is your brother's card. We got it from the Army a long time ago. Charge of desertion. But it's not in the current file any more. You see, we simply haven't the manpower to keep cases alive as long as we are accustomed to. Nowadays, with this blitz and all, there are too many urgent cases . . . No, I'm afraid we'll have to have more specific information if we are going to reopen the case . . ."

Months passed. The blitz was relegated to memory. Russia had withstood the great attack and was now throwing the Germans back from Moscow and the Caucasus. Dieppe was bright and recent history.

John's interim visits to Scotland Yard produced nothing but uniformly polite headshakes. His frequent excursions with his one-legged friend to the haunts of Spanish war veterans brought nothing but vague reminiscences of Spanish battlefields and French hospitals.

One morning in September, 1942, at his station on the south coast, John opened a letter. It was neither dated nor signed.

It read: "Bill Donaldson is living at 136, Strathcombe Street, near the London Docks." The handwriting was not Bill's.

Quickly obtaining leave on compassionate grounds, John was an hour later on a train bound for London. At Victoria he hired a taxi. Painfully, slowly, it

rolled along the Embankment, through the city, down Commercial Road. And finally it creaked to a stop in a grey and deserted street before a two-storey dwelling.

A short and shapeless woman opened the door. As she noticed John's rank she wiped her hands on her apron.

"Yes, indeed, sir," she said, nodding her head vigorously. "Mr. Donaldson is one of the guests here and a very nice gentleman he is . . . Bill Donaldson, yes. The Canadian gentleman . . . No, he's not in at present. But if you care to wait, sir."

John sat in a parlour full of threadbare chairs and cheap china. The housekeeper bustled around him and pointedly placed an ashtray within six inches of John's cigarette.

"No, I'm sure Mr. Donaldson won't be long," she said in the panting fashion of overstuffed persons. "He usually comes in about four. He can't work long hours, poor man, you know. He was dreadfully hurt in the war, you know—the Spanish war—and his whole left side is a mass of pain. I'll never know how he gets along. And so kind with it all . . . We're all ever so fond of him, poor man . . . He never mentioned having a brother here in England. But then, he never talks much about home. He never talks much about anything. He's on the quiet side, you know . . ."

John was glad when she bustled out of the room, panting. He wanted to think what he would say if his brother Bill really did walk into the room. Yet he could not think clearly. He was confused by doubt and by the wreckage of so many hopes previously dashed. His mind could not encompass the end of the search; the endless trail had become so much a part of the routine of his life. He pondered how Bill would look; he hadn't seen him for seven years. He tried to imagine what Bill would say—if this man *were* Bill. He didn't believe it possible, and yet the evidence seemed so conclusive . . .

The minutes were not winged. John started and snuffed out his cigarette each time he heard the doorbell ring; then relaxed and relighted when it turned out to be the postman, the raid warden, the housekeeper's sister dashing in for a drop of sugar. The ashtray was filled with John's half-smoked cigarettes.

Then the front door banged shut without benefit of ring, and John heard a woman's panting voice say, "Oh, Mr. Donaldson, there's a visitor to see you in the parlour. I didn't know you had a brother here . . ."

John's eyes were glued on the door. In the half light that struggled through the old-fashioned curtains, he saw a heavy-set figure, not quite straight, head bent over the left shoulder. And he heard a deep voice saying, "My brother? There must be some mistake . . ."

The man limped forward to the centre shaft of light. John darted toward him, then turned away momentarily. He could say nothing. His throat was

choked with bitterness.

"I thought I heard Mrs. Simmons say something about a brother. There must be some mistake."

"I'm sorry," John said. "The mistake must be mine. I was looking for a man called Bill Donaldson. I was told he lived here."

The man sat down and looked eagerly at John.

"But I *am* Bill Donaldson," he said. "And you are? . . ."

"My name is John Donaldson. I had a brother called Bill who was missing after the Spanish war and I thought—"

"And you thought I might be your brother. That's sad. I'm sorry, really sorry. I know how you must feel."

John picked up his hat and gloves.

"Please sit down. Perhaps Mrs. Simmons will make us some tea. I think I can help you a little, just a little. You see, I fought in Spain, too, and though I never met him, I heard about your brother—many times from many people. It seems a long time ago now, but we were always getting mixed up. It was only natural. Two Bill Donaldsons from Canada—fighting in Spain. I came from Montreal and your brother came from—Calgary?"

"Regina."

"Yes, Regina. It was quite a coincidence. Two Bill Donaldsons from Canada. Let's see if Mrs. Simmons will get us some tea and I'll tell you all I know about your brother. I think—I think you need look no more."

Bill Donaldson held his tea cup with his right hand and smiled a crooked smile which was lost in the scars on the left side of his face.

"The Spaniards loved your brother. I often lived in his reflected glory when I came to Madrid and later in France. He was a section leader—that would be about a corporal in our army—and he fought in all the big actions of the last eighteen months. I don't think we won a single one of those battles. Those were the bad times. But the Spaniards loved your brother because he was cheerful, laughing all the time, and he had a hatred of the Fascist that must have grown very deep and very strong inside him.

"I'm sorry. You want to know what happened to him. Well, I'll skip the stories I heard about him in the early battles. There's no record of them anyway, except in the hearts of the Spanish peasants who fought with him. But this, I know. It was told to me by a man who got away to France after the collapse.

"It must have been around the middle of March—in '39. You know what was happening then. We were done for—we knew it. They'd prepared the last push for a long time. Germans and Italians, Moroccans and Spanish regulars were in the encirclement move on the Aragon front. They had heavy artillery, mortars and planes, hundreds of 'em. We had nothing. Some of us didn't even

have rifles.

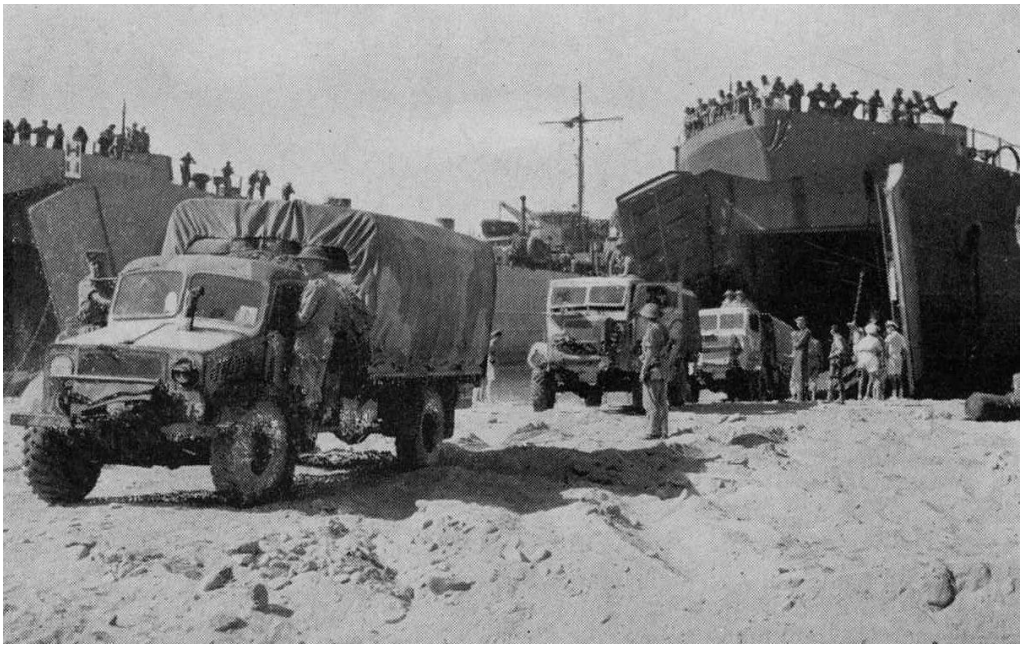
"Your brother's regiment was falling back with the rest. In good order? Well, yes. The units on the flanks had first priority on the rifles so the Fascists couldn't pull their squeeze play. We knew there was no hope, but if we could get as many men as possible into France—perhaps, we thought, they might fight again, when the world woke up.

"Well, there came a time when we didn't even have enough rifles to cover our flanks. Some who had rifles didn't have ammunition. It was a pitiful retreat. We died by the thousands.

"On one of the last days, it got really desperate. They were almost around us. We were not delaying their advance effectively enough. Only a series of counter-attacks could do that. But we had no ammunition, hardly any food. The colonel called for volunteers. And your brother's whole section stepped forward. A few of the men had grenades. Your brother Bill made himself a club from the branch of a tree.

"There was no time to wait for darkness. In broad daylight your brother led his section against the Fascists. He was last seen, club in hand, advancing on a machine-gun post. Club in hand, John! Club in hand—against machine-guns . . ."

John and I leaned on the rail of the troopship and we watched the peaks of Spain rising over the ground haze. Our convoy moved swiftly into the open waters of the Mediterranean—swiftly to the battlefield and the enemy. The same enemy.



Above: “It will be said, and probably correctly, that the most valuable new weapon we developed in this war was the simply constructed landing craft.” Supply trucks rolling up the beach in Pachino Peninsula, Sicily.

Above: “The guns shattered the rainswept sky and out of their thunder was emerging the new Europe.” The Eighth Army advancing up the Adriatic side of Italy.

3

With Montgomery in Sicily

General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery is neither beloved by his men nor is he a warrior of romantic stature. His compact with his troops is a straight business proposition; they give him their best and in return he gives them victory and its attendant glory. He is small, thin, and in his face may be read cunning and shrewdness. His first appearance gives the impression of a rather unsuccessful drygoods shopkeeper. When he speaks, however, he becomes a general. His voice is soft, rather diffident, but his gestures are shot through with Napoleonic grandeur. As are all little men whose appearance belies their status and success, he is extremely proud and incisive in action.

When he commanded the Eighth Army, Montgomery was not niggardly about publicity either for himself or for his army. He courted newspaper comment. In the heat of battle he was never unaware of the presence of newspaper men and photographers. In his orders of the day at the start of every decisive battle, he stressed a thought that bubbled naturally within him. "The whole world is watching you—give the people at home good news and lots of it."

There was at least as much solid purpose as vanity in this attitude. By no other means could Montgomery, dour personality that he is, cause the Eighth Army's enthusiasm to grow with each successive task allotted to it; by no other means could its *esprit de corps* be maintained at such a dizzy level after a year of almost continuous fighting in the most arduous campaigns of the war.

The General's method and purpose became plain as I moved among the men of the Eighth Army in Sicily. They were perfectly aware of their reputation; they were proud, confident, almost cocky men. Each was more or less a reflection of the commander. Each knew that the Eighth Army's march from Alamein to Tripoli had marked the turning point of the war in the West. Montgomery exploited the Alamein victory to make the world Eighth Army-conscious, then he proceeded with skilful deliberation to make the Eighth Army world-conscious. One attitude fed upon the other and the reciprocal effect was compounded with each victorious battle until the Eighth Army became in the eyes of the world—more importantly, in the eyes of the enemy

—a fabulous fighting organization. Montgomery used the power of publicity to fuse his men with the inspiration his own dour character could never impart. And without worshipping him his men fought magnificently under his command, because he and they were the invincible Eighth Army welded together by the presses of the world.

This system, effective though it was, horrified a great many of Montgomery's colleagues, particularly in the War Office. It was definitely foreign to the tradition of His Majesty's forces. And Montgomery's victories, hysterically cheered by the world, were received in many Whitehall quarters with thankfulness not unmixed with chagrin. His talent for warfare has always been divorced by his colleagues and his superiors from his acceptances as an individual. Personal connection has played no part in his advancement to increasingly important posts. Montgomery is credited with having Mr. Churchill's ear; certainly not his heart.

The explanation, rather, the mystery, lies in the confusion of strains which make up the Montgomery character. He is at once the most British and un-British of all distinguished Sandhurst graduates. He is the British general of legend in the austerity of his behaviour in the field, in the cold ruthlessness with which he dismisses officers he does not fancy, in his shortness of speech and temper with those immediately around him and in his imperiousness at his own headquarters. (I remember standing beside an intelligence officer at a Corps headquarters in southern Italy while he was trying to relay a message to a brigadier that Montgomery wanted to see him in seven minutes. The brigadier was reached after some delay and he was told, "The Army Commander wants to see you in exactly four minutes and 35, 34, 33 seconds.")

Yet the same Montgomery, visiting London on business for the first time after his Eighth Army triumphs, took so many bows in a musical comedy theatre that his ecstatic audience finally got weary of his performance. The membership of the Army and Navy Club was rendered aghast.

This complex man has become Britain's most successful soldier of the war. His detractors claim that he attained his eminence by the collusion of circumstance and good fortune: circumstance in the form of a plane accident which killed Major-General "Strafer" Gott as he was flying to Cairo to take command of the Eighth Army, and good fortune in the fact that he (Montgomery) was the first British general of this war to face a German force in the field on better than equal terms in manpower, material and air power.

His detractors naturally underrate Montgomery. It is true that he fell heir to the first full extravagance of American armament production. It is also true that Roosevelt and Churchill, appalled by the prospect of Rommel's break-through and loss of the whole Mediterranean position, gave Montgomery top priority on every conceivable item of war which might be dispatched. But

these factors only partly explain his unbroken record of victories stretching from Alamein deep in Egypt to the Sangro River in the heart of the Italian mainland, encompassed within a single breathless year.

The valid explanation of Montgomery's success is a negation of all the romantic notions a doting public has spun around him. He is the antithesis of a hell-bent-for-leather soldier; he is the exact opposite of a headlong, swashbuckling adventurer in uniform. He is in fact a most painstaking military scientist, methodical as a railway dispatcher, coldly practical as a moneylender. In the parlance of gambling, he is a percentage-player; he doesn't bet except on a sure thing. Montgomery never fights except when he knows he can win.

Like the percentage-player, Montgomery keeps an ace in the hole. His battle plan is often strategically exciting; for instance, his favourite "left hook." When it succeeds he is applauded for his imaginative conception; when the strategy fails it is found he has amassed in reserve a plentitude of men and material for a brute frontal assault in which he holds an ample advantage in numbers and firepower.

In the galaxy of Allied generals in the west—Eisenhower, Alexander, Montgomery, Patton, Clark, Bradley—the surprising fact is that Montgomery is the most calculating, militarily the least exciting.

The original plan for the conquest of Sicily was a daring one. The plan actually put into operation was safe as it was pedestrian. Successful as it was after thirty-eight days of stiff fighting, it lacked éclat; it was no tour de force. Montgomery's Eighth Army and Lieut.-General Patton's American Seventh Army pushed the Germans out of naturally strong positions, forced them into the Messina corner whence they funnelled on to the Italian mainland a battered force but still in being. There was no German collapse, no wholesale disintegration such as the world witnessed in Tunisia.

In order to understand the transition of the Sicilian plan, let us trace briefly the succession of Allied command responsibility in the central Mediterranean theatre. The choice of Sicily as the object of our offensive was hardly open to debate, but formal approval and instruction came to General Eisenhower from the Combined Chiefs of Staff sitting in Washington. Many plans for conquest of Sicily had, of course, been long in preparation and it was Eisenhower's function to review these plans in consultation with General Alexander, his deputy commander in the field. Having agreed with Eisenhower upon a suitable plan and having been allocated his material and the Eighth (British) and Seventh (U.S.) armies, Alexander proceeded to call into consultation Generals Montgomery and Patton and their planning staffs.

The original conception of the Sicily assault was in process of detailed development late in March, 1943, full seventy-five days before the zero hour

of July 10. It envisaged two widely-separated amphibious expeditions—the British forces to make straight for the port city of Catania and to spill out on the Catania plain and its vital Gerbini airfields; and the American forces to assault in the west and north of the island, overwhelming Palermo. From these bridgeheads our forces would fan out, strong spearheads racing along good coastal highways toward Messina.

This plan was of course a provisional one and certainly subject to change. It was selected long before the end in Tunisia and its feasibility depended on the location of German dispositions in Sicily, something our intelligence could not furnish at this early date. It was, however, a daring conception; one which, if successful, would have exploded German opposition probably in twenty days and might have bagged the whole of the German forces in the island.

In sharp contrast to this dashing conception was the actual plan put into operation on July 10. The Eighth Army nibbled off Pachino peninsula at the extreme southeast corner of the island and two days later captured the port of Syracuse. The Seventh Army landed on the beaches around Gela, almost dead centre of the south coast. From these two modest points of invasion, involving the minimum gamble allowed such an operation, the two armies fanned out, driving the Germans before them, never defeating any substantial number, never cutting them off.

Hindsight is an unsatisfactory peg on which to hang a point and I use it here in no spirit of criticism. I was more than mildly interested, however, in learning from intelligence officers on all fronts during the latter stages of the Sicilian campaign that the disposition of German forces at the time of our original landing was such as to ensure the success of the original (Catania-Palermo) plan. In other words, had we played boldly, we would have won a spectacular victory. Instead, we pushed the enemy out of Sicily and we were confronted by the same units when we landed on the Italian mainland.

The assault on Sicily developed exactly as it was planned. In most sectors our troops swarmed ashore without serious opposition; in isolated places where resistance was offered, it was quickly beaten down. Our forces proceeded inland as blueprinted and well ahead of schedule. Indeed, the conservative nature of our undertaking may be gauged by the fact that we were prepared for twenty thousand casualties during the landing operation; actually we had less than one thousand casualties.

Defence of the coast had been entrusted to local Italian regiments made up of poorly-trained and ridiculously-equipped home guards, and they stampeded to the safety of our prisoner-of-war cages on the beaches in such terrified disorder that our troops faced greater danger from being trampled upon than from bullets. Except at Gela, where General Patton’s men fought a brisk action, the southernmost bulwark of the Fortress Europe was as secure as a

country gate swinging in the wind. Within twenty-four hours the beaches were organized for reception of supplies and our lines stretched ten to fifteen miles inland with perfect security.

It will be said, and probably correctly, that the most valuable new weapon we developed in this war was the simply constructed landing craft. This type of vessel, which has a shallow draft capable of negotiating a beach of normal gradient and a square prow which when lowered becomes a serviceable ramp, has been turned out by the thousands in the United States and has made possible all our amphibious operations. For it must be remembered that a successful assault on an enemy-held beach is less than half the battle. The outcome depends less on the quality of shock troops than on the efficiency of supply lines. In our offensive against the Fortress Europe, which necessitates in nearly every case landings from the sea, the enemy has depended on his interior land lines of supply. We have resolved this difficulty with the LCI (landing craft infantry) and the LST (landing ship tank).

It was in the darkness of early morning that our troopship made contact with an LCI somewhere in the waters between Malta and Sicily. The transfer from the bulky liner to the bobbing LCI was a tricky business in the dark and we almost lost the brigadier and my typewriter. I was prepared to dive for the typewriter, but fortunately this proved unnecessary and soon we were on our way to Sicily.

The skipper of our LCI was a middle-aged Ayrshire farmer who dabbled with yachts before the war. The chief engineer was a stripling of nineteen; the coxswain was a beardless boy of seventeen, and the first officer a wizened old sailor of fifty-five recalled from retirement by the war after serving forty-one years with the Royal Navy. This, I thought, was a small example of Britain rising to a supreme occasion. Just such motley crews saved an army at Dunkerque.

At first light there was a shout from the bridge. The skipper pointed above the prow of the craft—and we saw the mountain peaks of Sicily bathed in morning purple. Our landfall came at Pachino beach and we moved up the east coast of Sicily. We put in at Syracuse, listened for a few minutes to the artillery battle raging for Augusta, eleven miles north, then bobbled along the shoreline to the brigade's designated offloading point at an inlet dubbed George Beach, some six miles south of Syracuse.

The scene was less exciting than many landing exercises I had witnessed in England. Although the invasion was only hours old, two pontoon quays were already in operation, and hundreds of Italian troops who had rushed down to the beaches in frantic anxiety to surrender were hard at work unloading ships and laying down wire netting to give added traction to supply trucks moving from the beachheads to the coastal road some two hundred yards inland. The

coast from Pachino to Syracuse was alive with our shipping. Dozens of freighters lay offshore and supplies were being transferred to landing craft and "ducks." Every strip of usable beach was organized as a miniature port, so widely dispersing our supply system that the Luftwaffe was thrice confounded. An occasional bombing attack could no more damage this supply organization than a hastily thrown brick could harm Ford's Willow Run plant.

Our LCI lowered its ramp on the seaward side of a pontoon quay and I walked ashore like a summer tourist. Two Italian prisoners rushed forward to carry my baggage and I might have flipped them a coin for their trouble if a burst of ack-ack hadn't reminded me this was war and not a conducted excursion. A German reconnaissance plane whistled in from the sea, climbed high and made off, probably with a picture of the beach. That incident and the stench of a dozen still unburied Italian bodies lying among the weeds high on the beach were the only evidences of conflict. I who had steeled myself for a blood and thunder assault at the gate of Fortress Europe! It was all too dull.

The sun was overpowering. It gave a sickly warmth reminiscent of an evening time I fell asleep in front of an electric heater and awoke green with illness. I reclined on the beach beside a British Marine commando who wore nothing but shorts and a steel helmet.

"Anything exciting in the landing?" I asked.

"Nothing except a murder," he said. "One son-of-a-bitch of an Eyetie grabbed our padre and locked him up in that little hut—you can see it up there—at least what's left of it. When we go for the hut, the Eyetie bastard opens the door and throws a live grenade in. He was a good chap, the padre. Well, we got the Eyetie. He'll never pull that trick again."

We pitched camp in an almond orchard on the outskirts of Cassibile, a hamlet on the main coastal highway south of Syracuse. The place was a collection of limestone shacks. On the stoop of each sat a woman nursing a baby at her breast and eyeing us unhappily. The suckling of babies seemed to be the most public of all family functions in Sicily. The urban scenery in our subsequent conquest of the island was an unbroken demonstration of the weaning qualities of Mussolini's womanhood.

Until our arrival a lone Eighth Army M.P. stood at the town's crossroads as the only evidence that Cassibile was conquered territory. This man stood under a sign which read: "Troops will refrain from shooting Italian carabinieri. These men are co-operating with us to maintain order behind the lines and they are entitled to carry rifles. (Signed) H. R. Alexander, General. Military Governor."

Late that afternoon I drove through Syracuse to Eighth Army headquarters to inquire into the progress of the campaign. The report was not exciting. Our troops were advancing northward, brushing aside Italian rearguards and ineffective roadblocks. The first battle, however, was in process of developing

on the Catania plain. The Germans awaited us there.

I arranged to proceed to the front.

The journey north along the coastal highway from Syracuse to the front was a demonstration of dust, heat, Sicilian poverty and the resilience of my posterior upholstery. The highway swings inland as it leaves Augusta and winds picturesquely around the crests of mountains, teeters on the edge of sheer cliffsides and makes use of numerous small bridges spanning dried-out river beds in the valleys. This lent itself easily to road demolitions and German engineers aided and abetted by the Luftwaffe did a thorough job. Our endless convoys were forced to leave the tarmac and take detours over dirt roads.

I rode on the steel rear of a jeep in the midst of a convoy consisting of Sherman tanks, ducks, trucks pulling medium artillery and ambulances. The dust attained the consistency of a bad London fog. Within fifteen minutes every man in the convoy looked like Eddie Cantor in whiteface. We tried wetting our handkerchiefs and tying them over our faces, bandit-fashion, but these dried out within two minutes in the intense heat and as we couldn't spare the water we simply breathed dust and left it to the M.O. to worry about the consequences.

This motley cavalcade (a modern army on the advance bears no resemblance whatsoever to any military procession you have ever seen) rumbled through dust-stricken villages each with its multitude of sad-eyed women, one arm hugging their babies to their ample bosoms and the other offering up a diffident V-sign. Children scampered up and down the roadside shouting "biscoti!" their Latin cunning having quickly noted the willingness of our troops to part with hardtack. Old men, bent and broken, held up empty bottles begging water.

What should have been a two-hour drive required eight desolate hours, so effective were the road demolitions. It was dusk when we sighted the thatched roofs of Carlentini etched against the darkening summer sky. This hilltop town is a suburb of Lentini six kilometers beyond. Dark had fallen when we entered Lentini, but the whole populace lined the streets in innocent defiance of an eight o'clock curfew which required all retire indoors. In the main square an M.P. waved us on. He stood beneath a sign which read: Catania—32 kilometers.

Between Lentini and Catania lay the rich Catania plain. Here the German defences awaited; here was about to be joined the main battle for Sicily.

The German plan of defence for Sicily was based on Mount Etna. Here was a position thrown up by nature in her most violent mood, and it was stronger than all the labour battalions of Fritz Todt could hope to construct. Its eastern slopes fell down to the Mediterranean and commanded fifty miles of the coastal highway. Its southern slopes looked upon the broad Catania plain.

Its lava-encrusted western side made natural fortresses of the towns of Adrano, Bronte and Randazzo. Here the Germans could apply every lesson of defensive warfare.

The breaking of the Etna position was the task of Montgomery and his Eighth Army. While General Patton's American Seventh Army swung north from Gela, overwhelmed the western half of Sicily, captured Palermo, and performed prodigious feats of mobility and engineering, Montgomery chose for himself the task of smashing the core of German resistance in the island—the Mount Etna Line.

As is his careful practice, Montgomery approached the Etna line with two well-prepared plans in mind. He could swing directly up the coastal highway from Lentini, spill out on the Catania plain, and attempt a frontal break-through to the city of Catania which was the eastern anchor of the Etna line. Or he could send the left wing of his army on a wide swing around the interior of the island to capture the town of Adrano, which was the western anchor of the line.

In order to build the success of one plan upon the possible failure of the other, Montgomery disposed his forces thusly: The 5th and 50th divisions deployed on the coastal highway directly facing the Catania position. The 51st (Highland) division held the middle ground facing the southern sweep of Etna and was in position to maintain steady pressure on the German line and to harass German movement between the two anchor points, Catania and Adrano. The 1st (Canadian) division was rolling up the east centre of Sicily as the prepared spearhead of the "left hook" should this become necessary. Montgomery had still another crack division—the famous 78th—poised for embarkation from a North African port. He used this brilliantly, as we shall discover later.

Thus disposed, Montgomery decided to test the strength of the Etna position by attempting a frontal assault. The 5th and 50th divisions swept up the east highway, through Lentini, their objective the storming of the Catania plain with its Gerbini airfields and the capture of Catania itself. Success of this operation would have smashed the Etna line immediately and cleared the short road to Messina.

It was in the wake of these two divisions, and in the hope of watching them smash through to Catania, that I joined the mass movement on the road out of Lentini to the battlefield of the plain.

Men going into battle for the first time undergo a complete divorcement from their normal selves. Perhaps this is a chemical reaction. They find themselves mysteriously bypassing the ordinary processes by which they are accustomed to govern their basic feelings. Their mental and emotional machinery is suddenly short-circuited by reflex action. Fear and anger and

fatigue are overwhelmed and lost; only sight and sound are dominant and these combine with instinctive self-preservation to command reaction on a first battlefield.

Neither brave nor unusual was my behaviour on the Catania battlefield. If I was not conscious of fear, it was because I was numbed by the sights and sounds of the desperate fairyland into which I was thrust. I wandered in the coma of my own wonderment. First battles play thusly on the individual of average temperament. Only when I came out of the line did I count all the reactions I should have, but did not, feel while I watched the battle. In subsequent battles I knew fear—sickly, sweaty fear—because the thunder and spectacle of battle had become familiar and no longer possessed the power to divorce me from the cerebral exercises I had practised all my life. But my first battle was a selfless experience. I shall not forget it.

The road out of Lentini was dusty and dark, crowded and tortuous. Not a light could be shown. The Germans were only five miles beyond the hills and their planes (as well as ours) hummed in the sky. Our jeep inched forward, tracing the rear wheels of the truck just ahead. Over the roar of traffic I could hear the thump of medium artillery reverberating in the valleys below. This traffic jam in a Sicilian wilderness seemed unreal as a Ringling Brothers circus in the middle of the Sahara.

On both verges of the road Eighth Army troops trudged in single file toward the battlefield. They wore shirts, shorts, and steel helmets, and they carried rifles and automatic weapons. A three-inch mortar was lugged by two men; ammunition was distributed among those immediately behind. It was hot. The men's faces were caked with dirt. Twice between Lentini and the front, all forward traffic was stopped to allow an ambulance convoy to come away from the battlefield. The men trudging single file on both verges did not look at the ambulances, they moved ahead mechanically.

The road skirted the crest of a mountain and levelled on a plateau. The moon, round and orange, shimmered on the Mediterranean to our right. Our dusty cavalcade moved faster between lines of troops. We rolled along the plateau for perhaps two miles. Then, when we could see the road falling away into a valley, an M.P. flagged us to a stop. He saluted smartly. Eighth Army M.P.'s would do credit to a Guards ceremonial parade, no matter how sticky the situation.

"Shell-fire just ahead, sir," he said. "You'd better not go forward from here unless—"

We swung into a field by the side of the road and parked the jeep in the shadow of a clump of high cactus. On foot I moved deeper into the field toward the edge of the plateau where it looked down on the vast Catania plain. Before I had walked fifty yards a figure came out of the dark. I saw the gleam

of a bayonet, and heard the challenge.

"Desert rates."

"Kill Italians," I sang out. This was the password.

The soldier came closer. "Watch yourself here, sir. They've dropped parachute troops in this area. We're hunting them down."

I slithered across the field to a point which afforded me an unobstructed view of the whole Catania battlefield lying before me in the moonlight like a silver relief map. I lay on my stomach and wondered upon the scene.

Just below, the Catania plain stretched like a billiard table eight miles across. Its opposite extremity was broken by the foothills of Mount Etna. To the right, where the foothills tumbled into the Mediterranean, was the city of Catania. The full orange moon hung like a stage prop over the sea.

The moon. Mighty Mount Etna. And between, Armageddon.

The hills across the plain flickered with gunflashes of German eighty-eights. Our answering artillery lit up the wooded area around the enemy emplacements. Suddenly a plume of green flame burst forth; we had hit an ammunition dump. A flight of our fighter-bombers screamed down on the enemy gun positions and was met by red and yellow tracer. The plain below crackled with machine-gun fire. Tracer on the open field looked like a plague of fireflies. Splitting the plain in half, the Simeto River flowed placidly into the sea.

As we swung more guns into position, the din of battle reached thunderous proportions. The whole plain was alive with tracer and gun flashes. The woods opposite were burning fiercely. On the highway close by, sweating, grim-faced troops moved endlessly over the crest into the valley below, seeing in terrifying panorama the multi-coloured death into which they must march.

Because it was night, I could not make out the detail of the battle on the plain. That it was a desperate fight I knew by the din and flash of firepower and by the frantic work of stretcher-bearers. The scene was crazy and grotesquely beautiful. Only the mountain, the moon and the river remained sane and imperturbable.

On the dawn the battle was bereft of its colour, but its pattern lay clearly before me. On our side of the plain Eighth Army artillery was deployed behind farmhouses, haystacks and camouflaged by shrubbery. German artillery popped at us from cleverly hidden emplacements in the Etna foothills eight miles across.

The focal point of the infantry battle that raged all night and all day was a four-hundred-foot bridge spanning the Simeto River. Beyond the bridge the highway cut straight as a die for five miles into the city of Catania. Every inch of the highway between the bridge and the city was covered by German fire from reinforced dwellings and cement cupolas.

During the night our troops had cleared the plain, captured the bridge and held tenuously to an area two thousand yards beyond it. But at a terrible cost. Our dead lay on the banks of the river and on the bridge. German dead were scattered in a shallow trench on the opposite side of the river. The heat was intense and the smell overpowering. I moved cautiously into the plain and as close to the bridge as I dared to go. Some of our elements were across it, but German artillery had neutralized the point by dropping shells all around the span. Nothing moved in the area. The dead lay unburied. Beyond the bridge I could see the rooftops of Catania glinting in the morning sun. But the five miles of highway between us and the city was a one-way street to eternity. No Balaclava charge was feasible here. The two divisions we had on hand would have been wiped out to a man before they could reach the main enemy positions.

For three days the opposing artillery duelled across the open plain. During the three nights attack and counter-attack by infantry swirled around the area of the bridge. The Germans clung fiercely to their superior position. Not even British destroyers racing boldly across the Catania harbour defences and firing hundreds of shells into German positions could break the steel of the enemy's resistance. He sat firmly on the hills of Etna, his rear as secure as the mountain itself, and he commanded the whole sweep of the plain.

After the 5th and 50th British divisions had spent themselves to the point of exhaustion, Montgomery gave up the attempt to storm the plain and the city. He pulled the alternative trick out of his well-stocked bag. He would squeeze the enemy out of the Catania position by a flanking attack—his famous "left hook." His objective was now the capture of Adrano and the instrument he used to spearhead this manœuvre was the 1st (Canadian) division.

I threw a bedroll into my jeep and came away from the Catania battlefield, swinging for more than a hundred miles on a wide arc through a network of interior roads until I reached the Canadians at Leonforte.

Since landing at Pachino on July 10, the Canadians had done little fighting and much travelling. They pushed north-north-west at the rate of ten miles a day, grumbling not a little over the lack of opposition because they were notoriously the toughest of all Canadian divisions and they had waited three and a half years for a chance to fight.

Montgomery was at Canadian divisional headquarters just outside Leonforte on the day I arrived there. He was conferring with slim, colourless, thirty-nine-year-old Major-General Guy Granville Simonds, the Canadian commander whose tactical genius had lifted him from major to major-general in less than three years. The quick capture of Leonforte, a hilltop town with not inconsiderable defensive features, had pleased Montgomery. He highly approved Simonds' tactics and was impressed by the headlong dash and spirit

with which half a Canadian brigade and a troop of tanks cleaned out the German rearguard.

As a group of correspondents approached Simonds' caravan—the group consisted of Ross Munro of the Canadian Press, William A. Wilson of British United Press, Peter Stursberg of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and myself—Montgomery left the diffident Simonds sitting alone and approached us with a wide smile.

"Well, gentlemen," he beamed, "there is very little to say. The campaign is going well and the Canadians are magnificent—yes, magnificent. Excellent troops, well trained, very well trained indeed."

He went on to say, "The German in Sicily is doomed. Absolutely doomed. He won't get away." This was one of the few Montgomery predictions which failed to come true. The Germans did get away.

Montgomery climbed into his open touring car, sitting in the front seat next to the driver. He rolled away, waving his arms at each silent soldier as though acknowledging the cheers of a multitude. This was an old custom of his. He does not believe in driving through his lines unrecognized. It is his policy to be as conspicuous a visitor as possible among his troops, to let them know he is about. He has impressed this practice upon his corps and divisional commanders.

When Montgomery departed, General Simonds called in his staff. The northward trek of the Canadians was ended. They were to make a sharp right turn at Leonforte and push due east toward Adrano. The left hook was about to be launched.

The physical features of central Sicily make for a war correspondent's dream. The main towns are built on bald mountain tops averaging two thousand feet in height. The roads ribbon through the valleys between. Seldom was a battle fought in this area which could not be seen in every detail from a point of vantage on one of the mountain-tops. The correspondent required merely a pair of binoculars and the willingness to climb to the topmost point of a mountain which could not be managed wholly by jeep. From here the field of operations spread out before him like a living relief map.

When the Canadians moved eastward from Leonforte, I climbed near-by Mount Assoro. My jeep managed the corkscrew road to the little town of Assoro perched on top of the 2,300-foot mountain. I parked in the courtyard of the town's *albergo* and proceeded on foot along cobbled lanes to the dome of the mountain.

An artillery observation post was set up in the ruins of a twelfth-century Norman fort, evidence of Sicily's long history of conflict and invasion. The day was bright and clear, visibility unlimited. I looked east. Below was the valley of Nissoria tumbling through low hills toward the mountaintop town of

Agira, eleven miles east. Looming behind Agira I could see the massive shape of Etna dimly silhouetted against the noonday sky. Etna was fifty-two miles east and only its top extremity was visible, but I knew somewhere at its base was Adrano, object of the new Canadian push.

As I looked over the side of precipitous Assoro, I could see the battle developing. Tanks of the Three Rivers (Canadian) Regiment were crawling along the single road; from this height they looked like undersized snails. The smoke of shell explosions rolled lazily over the valley. Now and again I could see the minute figures of infantry parties scurrying from shrubbery to shrubbery. The confused rumble of artillery and automatic fire filled the valley. It was suddenly cut through by the shriek of planes. Out of the south three squadrons of R.A.F. and American medium bombers, flying almost level with my eerie perch, roared over Agira. Fire and smoke spurted from the white rooftops of the town.

Here was a panorama for the gods of war. From the single vantage point I could see at once the tank and infantry battle in the valley below and also the air preparation for the future battle of Agira. But even so phenomenal a sight soon became a bore to the eye. Panorama so vast that it loses its detail is a delusion, a fake, a fraudulent thrill. I descended the slopes of Assoro into the valley. Here was the stern stuff of battle—the sweat and the cursing, the wreckage, the wounded, the prisoners, a shallow grave surmounted by a shattered 25-pounder and the three crumpled helmets of its crew.

The struggle in the valley was the campaign's first formal battle between Canadians and Germans. For the Canadians the long drive forward against a thin screen of opposition was over. The Germans awaited heavily entrenched on every favourable feature of the valley; their orders were to stand and fight. To the German High Command, Montgomery's strategy was clear; his "left hook" was anticipated the moment the Canadians turned eastward from Leonforte.

Knowing that the left wing of Montgomery's army consisted only of the First Canadian Division, the German High Command made what seemed to it ample preparation. The valley between Leonforte and Agira was speckled with strongpoints; every tilt of ground sprouted machine-gun and mortar batteries; every turn of the winding road hid an eighty-eight. The approach to Agira itself was commanded by the town cemetery. Here the tombstones bristled with machine and anti-tank guns. Nine miles behind Agira was the village of Regalbuto, standing on comparatively low terrain but capable of effective delaying action. From Regalbuto to Adrano, a twelve-mile stretch of tarmac highway was completely dominated by a ridge of wild hills to the north, each a natural fortress. The precipitous peaks of these hills were lavishly manned and fully equipped with every weapon in the German arsenal.

Such were the obstacles thrown into the path of the lone Canadian division. The Germans were fully justified in estimating that the division, if it could run this gauntlet, would lack the strength and the spirit to launch a successful attack on the fortified town of Adrano and its massive outpost, Centuripe. If a stalemate could be forced before Adrano, the Germans hoped, Montgomery might have no alternative than to revert to the Catania plain and send his 5th and 50th divisions into that sun-browned slaughterhouse of firepower.

How Montgomery confounded the German plan remains his brilliant contribution to the Sicily campaign. His was a stunning conception magnificently carried through by the troops under his command.

"The trouble with new troops is that they're too brave." I was reminded of this dictum, attributed by legend to General Montgomery, as I descended into the valley below Assoro and watched the Canadians swing into their first formal battle of the Sicily campaign. I knew the Canadian was a well-trained soldier; three years of unwasted time in England accomplished that. I knew he was an intelligent soldier; this was guaranteed by the high standard of living and education in Canada. I did not know that he possessed so voracious and rollicking an appetite for battle.

Fighting in the Sicilian hills was a supreme test of the individual soldier. Marches to the front were made in blazing heat and choking dust. The terrain was lacerated with cliffs and gulleys so wild and rocky the Canadian division was never able to exert its full weight in a single action. Most of the fighting was done on a brigade front. Important features were taken by a single company, sometimes by a section. It was the sort of fighting in which the sergeant was often the most important man in the line. Lance-corporals found themselves in charge of an attack.

The Canadians revelled in this test of stamina and individual resourcefulness. They were endowed with a fierce exultation, and I began to believe the stories I had read as a schoolboy about the Canadians in the last war—stories my young and cynical mind had attributed to legend and jingoism. But here were youngsters making these stories live again, and doing it with appalling lust for battle. Within the accepted rules of war they would rather kill Germans than take them prisoner, and they were hardly more concerned about their own lives.

Indeed, there is plausible evidence that the first Germans defeated in the battle for Agira were overcome, not so much by the impact of the Canadian attack as by their own astonishment at seeing troops advance toward them over open ground—*standing up*! Veteran Germans, diligently trained in cover tactics, simply gaped when the Canadians came leaping and yelling over bare terrain. One of the prisoners—a steel-spined non-commissioned officer—complained bitterly on this point as though it were a violation of the Hague

conventions.

That the Canadians did not suffer excessive casualties in their sweep across more than thirty miles of fortified hills was due to two fortunate factors: The first was the tactical brilliance of General Simonds. The German defence consisted of a series of scattered strong points each of which required an individual plan of attack, and Simonds showed a particular genius for assessing each situation and implementing his plan quickly. The second was the explosive power showered on the enemy before the Canadians attacked. We had almost complete domination of the air as well as an overwhelming superiority in artillery. The division was lavishly endowed with 25-pounders and a British medium artillery regiment was added to this already imposing array.

The result was that the Germans were often dazed by high explosives before the Canadians stormed their positions. When I met the first sizable batch of prisoners being escorted back of the lines, Hitler's warriors were green with vomit and jittery as a Bowery bum after a banquet of nickel whiskey.

In the cool of the first light, some twenty troops of the Loyal Edmonton raised their heads over a thicket and studied the movements of a German mortar battery ensconced behind a rock pile on a bald hill two hundred yards distant.

The Canadians gathered around in a football huddle. The lone officer among them, a twenty-year-old lieutenant, whispered, "The sergeant and I will sneak around the left and give 'em a tommy-gun massage. Now, when you hear our fire, the rest of you gallop in and take 'em apart. You"—indicating a lance-corporal—"you'll be in charge. Everybody ready?"

The men nodded with the eager delight of a lot of tots playing cowboys and Indians.

Lieutenant and sergeant crept on their hands and knees to a point twenty yards to the left of the German position. Suddenly leaping to their feet, they charged forward, tommy-guns blazing. The lieutenant dropped immediately, a bullet through his forehead. The sergeant's fire was almost drowned out by the yelping and shooting of his eighteen comrades making the frontal assault. Within three minutes the Germans were overwhelmed, eight of them dead, three prisoners.

"Wait a minute!" yelled the sergeant. "More Jerries!" On a hill three hundred yards ahead six Germans, aroused from their sleep by the sudden sound of battle, were bustling around for a getaway. The sergeant had his eye on one German who was caught in the embarrassing position of answering a call of nature. In the field this operation consists of relaxing loosely on one's haunches, after, of course, letting one's trousers fall down the ankles. An

expanse of buttock caught the sergeant's eagle eye at three-hundred-yard range.

"Lemme at that Sten gun," he yelled, pushing aside the lance-corporal. "I want to pull off the greatest 'goose' in all history."

He took quick aim and hit the bull's-eye with six rounds.

"Yeah," said the chunky sergeant as he surveyed the newly-won position, "that's what you call catching the Jerry with his pants down. Too bad about the lieutenant, though. He got it fast. Too tall, that was his trouble. Now take a guy like me. I'm a shorty. They gotta shoot low to get me—the bastards."

Thus the Canadians fairly frolicked over the valley toward Agira, laughing and dying with uniform éclat and thoroughly mystifying such calculating warriors as the Herman Goering division. On the second afternoon our forward elements were already fighting in the first streets of Agira. I stood on a heavily wooded hill a mile short of the town. A company of the 48th Highlanders (of Toronto) was resting in the shelter of trees. We could hear the rifle and machine-gun fire in the town.

A sergeant approached the major. "Excuse me, sir. I think we've spotted about thirty Jerries in some sort of a fortification below the road. They're about a mile back, sir. You can see 'em from the edge of this hill. I don't think they know the score, sir."

The major and I walked to a clearing on the side of the hill and through binoculars we could see the Germans plainly. They didn't know the score, obviously. They sat behind their rocky barricade, some of them washing, others cooking, a few peering now and again over the top of the rocks as though looking for signs of enemy. This was characteristic of the German reaction to the headlong tactics of the Canadians. The Jerries were two miles behind our forward positions and had no awareness of this rather important circumstance.

"Spot the position and send a runner back," ordered the major. "One 25-pounder will do the job—beautifully."

"Can't we go and get 'em ourselves?" pleaded the sergeant, his face puckered up with mental anguish.

"No. Send a runner back."

The sergeant saluted, then slumped away like a whipped schoolboy.

It was Sunday morning in the dusty hills. We wouldn't have known it was Sunday if someone in the signals truck, searching for the eight-fifteen B.B.C. news, hadn't accidentally tuned in on a church service. Organ music boomed over the encampment and somebody said, "Gee. It's Sunday morning."

One day was very much like another during the push toward Adrano. After being lulled to sleep by the regularity of our artillery firing into German positions beyond the inevitable mountain slope, we were awakened at the

dawn by the roar of our planes sweeping down on the enemy. That was the cheery alarm clock. Not so pleasurable was the disturbance on infrequent mornings when a squadron of Jerry planes came scampering low in the shadows of the valley, shooting up everything in sight. On such occasions our ack-ack rent the lazy atmosphere and the camp was on the alert. It didn't settle down until tea was brewed.

But having discovered this was Sunday morning, we also became aware that it was a particularly placid day. The sky was very quiet; the sun beat down on the almond orchard in which we were encamped; everybody was drowsy. The big action in the Agira valley was over, and the town of Agira was ours. I could see it from where I lay on a safari cot—a pile of white, jagged masonry cluttering up the top of an otherwise noble mountain. No planes came to disturb us and even the artillery seemed to have spiked its thunder. The confusion of war was blanketed by the holiness of sabbath.

Then Montgomery's big open car purred through the camp, the General himself waving his arms at all and sundry. We edged over to where Montgomery was conferring with Simonds. The Army commander approached us with a benign smile on his face.

"The campaign is going well—very well indeed. Yes, very well," he mused. "We have the Hun where we want him and we are going to hit him—hit him hard. Very hard. He won't get away. Every German on this island is doomed."

The General's prediction turned out, of course, highly inaccurate. But there was justification for his good humour. His brilliant plan for breaking the Etna line was clicking inexorably toward a smashing climax.

The town of Regalbuto, next objective of the Canadians' eastward sweep, was an easy mark. The tough job of clearing the valley before the town was accomplished by a British brigade, a gallant formation popularly called "the Malta brigade" because of its long defensive service during the siege of that island. The town of Regalbuto was mercilessly bombed by R.A.F. and American planes until it became untenable. Our main difficulty in moving through Regalbuto was caused by the rubble of our own bombardment.

With Regalbuto in our hands, the next objective was climactic. It was Adrano, the eastern hinge of the Etna line and itself a natural fortress lying on rising ground with the mass of Mount Etna at its back.

An advance along the twelve-mile tarmac highway to Adrano was out of the question. Every yard of the road was dominated by German batteries in a ridge of trackless mountains running north of the road and parallel to it. The task of the Canadians was to clear these ridges and leave the highway strictly alone. The Germans knew this, and they were prepared to withstand a "left hook" of such strength as the single Canadian division could gather. Adrano

was strongly held and so was its satellite fortress of Centuripe.

Here was where Montgomery pulled a tactical rabbit out of his multi-badged beret.

While the Canadians, taking to mulepack, trekked into the wild mountains to clear enemy batteries from the ridges, Montgomery ordered embarked from North African ports the famous British 78th Division. This movement of some fifteen thousand men and immense impedimenta was made with utmost despatch and secrecy. They were brought into Sicily and moved into position under cover of the dark nights of early August. The 78th was a crack division, victor of Longstop Hill in Tunisia, spearhead of the breakthrough to Tunis.

For five days the Canadians probed the ridges north of the Regalbuto-Adrano highway, fighting small but vicious actions. The Germans moved troops to meet this threat, disposed adequate reinforcements at Adrano and Centuripe for the expected one-division assault.

Virtually out of the blue streamed the 78th Division. These fresh formations attacked from the south, overwhelmed Centuripe in a few hours, then fanned out to form a half circle around the southern fringes of the Adrano position. At the same time the Canadians, having cleared the ridges in five days of spartan living and desperate fighting, swept down from the north into the valley of the Simeto which lay at the base of Adrano. Montgomery had foxed the Hun. His “left hook” had been thrown just as the Germans had foreseen, but what the enemy had not anticipated was a punch of such vast power as the 78th added to the Canadians.

Nor did this sudden display of power at the gates of Adrano satisfy Montgomery. He halted the 78th and the Canadians on the fringes of the town and handed over the fortress to the artillery and the air forces. For two nights and a day we watched from the valley below as our guns and planes made rubble of the fortified buildings.

And on the morning of August 7, advance patrols of the 78th Division climbed cautiously over the wreckage of Adrano. Hardly a shot had to be fired. The Germans were dead or had fled.

The east hinge of the Etna line broken, the rest of the line became untenable. On the Catania plain, the Germans blew up their stores and emplacements and raced north along the narrow highway between Etna and the sea. Catania was evacuated, the great German position based on Etna completely smashed. The “left hook” had worked.

I entered Adrano with forward troops on the morning of August 7 and I looked upon a scene of desolation the like of which only a tortured subconscious could conjure. Dust and ashes, death and destruction were everywhere. Nothing lived, nothing stood; everything was smashed and splattered. Bodies of enemy dead still lay in grotesque patterns amid the ruins.

German guards hurled out of windows by the impact of high explosive lay in the sun-baked roadways, their bodies blackened and swollen twice their normal size. Bathed in sharp morning sunlight, the scene was reminiscent of an old English print depicting the black plague.

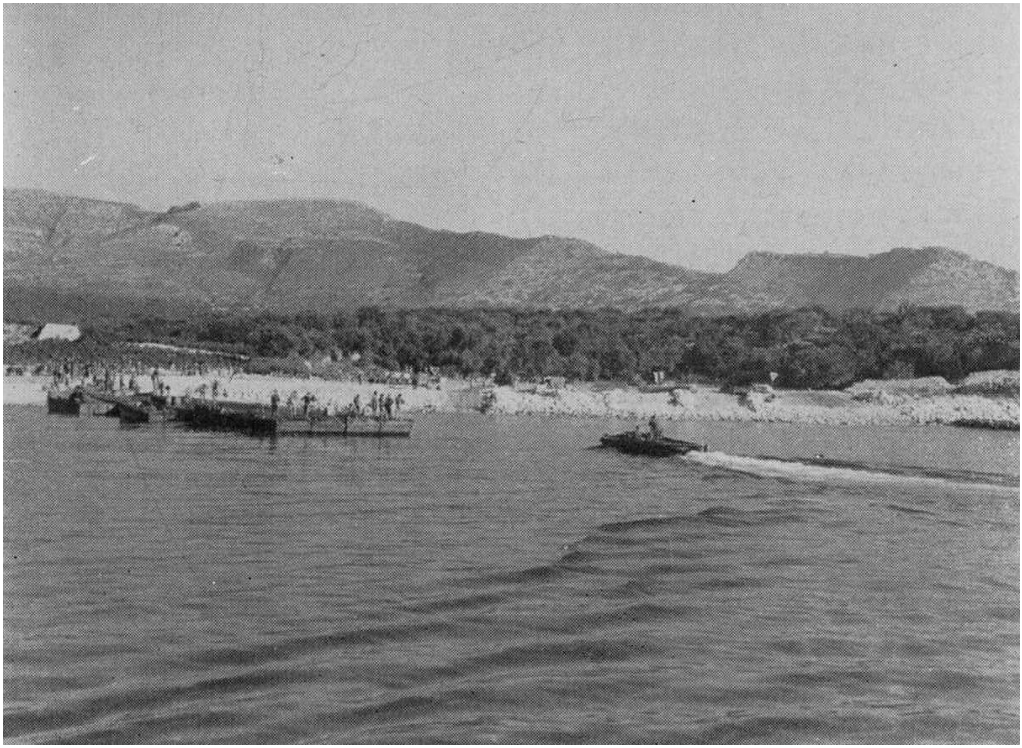
Adrano must have been a lovely city before Mussolini set his curse upon Italy. It is not drab and dusty like other Sicilian towns, nor is it set on a bald mountain peak. Lying at the foot of Etna, it is refreshed by the winds and the springs which roll down from the heights. Around the base of Adrano, the rich Simeto River flows to Catania and the sea; its banks are lush with vineyards and orchards.

I had seen enough of the agony and ashes of this once-beautiful city of the Simeto. The smell of death was everywhere, mixed with gas and dust as tanks and guns of the 78th bounced and snorted through the streets in pursuit of the fleeing enemy. I went down into the valley and at once I was refreshed by the sight of the Simeto, bubbling and scampering like a silly child.

Along the bank of the river, the folk of Adrano, laden with baskets and small pieces of furniture, trudged toward the town. The women wept as they looked upon their stricken homes. Their return was but to wreckage.

I undressed and stepped into the cool Simeto. It was my first bath in twenty-seven days. As I lay in the water and looked toward the crest of Etna, I could see a thin line of dust marking the highway north to Bronte and Randazzo. This was the route of the German retreat. The air thrummed with the sound of our planes. The hills above crackled with the bark of our 25-pounders. The Germans were in full retreat along every road converging on Messina. Except for the chase, the campaign was over. Sicily was conquered.

“Every strip of usable beach was organized as a miniature port.”



A view of supply and infantry landing craft on a beach near Syracuse.

4

Face to Face With Fascism

LET US NOT CONCERN OURSELVES here with the science of Fascism, nor with the precepts and theories of the authoritarian state as spun by Mussolini out of the dreams of his radical beginnings. Fascism didn't work in Italy after twenty-one years of unfettered opportunity at home and not a little encouragement and support abroad. The reason for its failure are best left to political scientists, philosophers and economists who are experienced in mixing a fine intellectual brew out of dried leaves of the past and sprigs of the future.

Having looked at Fascism in Italy, I decline to discuss its theoretical structure. There is for me no point of discussion. When a coke-crazed thug wraps a crowbar around the skull of a pedestrian on a dark street, a thesis toward a doctorate is not offered up in the matter. When a hijacker waylays a truck on the Lincoln Highway and makes off with a load of silk stockings, it is a case for police, not a Congressional committee. And when a mass of spiritless people are bullied and beaten into economic subjection and military slavery in order to enhance the profit and vanity of a Fascist coterie, I do not elevate this process of simple, coldblooded gangsterism to the level of political discussion.

It was not always thus with me. For in the years before the war and, indeed, until I proceeded to Italy with our forces, Fascism, as I read about it and felt about it, was a hateful philosophy and a rival political system. A philosophy and a political system nonetheless. But I recanted soon after I saw Fascism in action and moved among the Italian people. Its fraud screamed to the high cloudless heavens over the drab towns of Sicily. Its fake, its deception, its rampant physical cruelty were so obvious, so childishly obvious, that I began to wonder how we in the western world could have been gullible enough to accord it even passing recognition as lawful government. Mussolini's Fascism was a puerile racket played with the finesse of a two-bit thug upon a dull and helpless peasantry. Al Capone would have laughed.

Let us, therefore, avoid a discussion of Italian Fascism. Let us merely look at it.

The most fabulous circumstance in the tragedy of Italy is this: The Italian

soldier, who fought hard and sometimes most effectively in various parts of Africa, failed to raise a rifle in defence of his own homeland.

This development came as a complete surprise to the Eighth Army. Indeed, the expectation of strong resistance by the Italian on his home soil was a potent factor in the choice of the careful rather than the daring plan in the assault on Sicily. Despite all the jokes passed about the Italian armies in Africa, the Eighth Army had a considerable degree of respect for the legions of Savoy. In the final stages of the Tunisian campaign they fought a shrewder and more valiant action than their German comrades. Field Marshal Messe and his troops were the last to give up their arms and by their bold stand they gained for themselves terms of surrender which stroked their honour and their vanity.

Yet when we landed in Sicily they deserted their guns and their colours in wholesale lots. They streamed into our lines, grinning like Oriental beggars and applied themselves with zest to the tasks of unloading our ships. Between Pachino and Syracuse I counted three sets of coastal batteries, huge guns emplaced in solid rock and capable of playing havoc with our landing parties. These guns were in perfect condition, untouched by a single shell from our ships. When I passed them, each of these monster guns was guarded by a single British Tommy. They had not fired a shot.

The troops who surrendered to us in their thousands were mostly home guard detachments mixed with regular army divisions. A substantial percentage of these came from the districts they were posted to defend. It soon became obvious to us why these troops had no heart for defence. What was there to defend? Poverty? Illiteracy? Filth? Exploitation? Of course they let us in! At least, we gave them hardtack and we chased out the Germans.

Fascism had done nothing for these people. It had taken most of their meagre subsistence. It had conscripted their youth and brought a terrible war into their towns. In return it had given them a fraudulent notion that a clown with a bald head and an oversized jaw was going to make them masters of the world.

Their awakening had a Chaplinesque quality. It was poignantly comical to see a huge poster depicting a Roman warrior of exaggerated size and prodigious muscular development, and superimposed the lettering: Fascism Has Revitalized the Ancient Glory of Rome. Huddled at the base of the shady side of this emblazoned wall lay five hundred Italian prisoners. They were all little men, all haggard and stubbly, all smiling with childish diffidence at passing Allied troops, most raising their middle and index fingers in a V-sign. These were the conquerors—Mussolini's conquerors.

Everywhere we went, in every town and hamlet, on every available wall there were quotations from Mussolini's speeches. "Duce" was emblazoned in every space not occupied by the pundit's words. Stenciled silhouettes of the

well-known head and jaw filled out vacant corners. “Rome is the first city of Italy and the world”—Mussolini. “Work, fight, obey.”—M. “The fate and glory of Italy depend on our armed forces and only on our armed forces.”—Mussolini.

These were the words. They remained emblazoned on the walls long after we had conquered Sicily. Whether by design or neglect, we did not remove the signs. This was wisdom. Here, side by side in the rubble-heaped unhappy towns were the promise of Fascism and the performance.

If the aforementioned Al Capone had visited the land of his forebears, he might well have concluded that the years of his affluence in Chicago were a grievous waste of time and opportunity. Because Fascist hierarchy knew how to mulct the people and did it with a barefaced candour which would have appalled even Capone. He, poor laddie, had to pay his bodyguards and muscle men out of the profits he collected. The Fascist governors in each community I visited not only collected fabulous sums for their own pockets; they also collected fees from their victims to pay the upkeep of their bullies and torturers.

The average Sicilian town is a collection of limestone dwellings cowering before savage history on the peak of a high hill. Families average six to ten children all of whom sleep on mats clustered around the bed occupied by their parents. Cooking and washing is done outdoors, and the mother, when she is not nursing the inevitable baby, is queued up at the town well for two earthenware pitchers of precious water. When the father returns home from his work in a vineyard (belonging to an absentee landlord who lives in the mainland or in Catania or Palermo), his first chore is to lift a pail filled with the family’s feces, open the front door and fling the contents into the street. This pail stands as a permanent convenience in the middle of the single room.

However, if the father is of the thrifty variety, he has been able to acquire a mule. Ownership of a mule is the height of peasant affluence in Sicily and southern Italy. The mule-owner does not waste the family feces in the spendthrift manner of the average householder. He carefully transfers the feces to a large basket which is eventually hitched to the harness of his mule, and he brings this to the vineyard, where it is used as fertilizer. The use of human feces as fertilizer is as common in Sicily as is death from aggravated dysentery.

Sometimes the householder is a small merchant—a grocer or a baker. In this case he has no practical use for feces. And if his nose is so acutely sensitive that he does not fancy the smell of feces flung across his stoop, he digs a hole back of his dwelling. He lives no better than the vineyard worker because the cost of his license fee, which was collected at the local Fascist palace, closely approximated his profits. If he was a civil servant, he belonged

to the Fascist party and this was also, by his standards of exchequer, an expensive procedure.

However, there was a future in being a member of the Fascist party. He might some day become a member of the town's Fascist hierarchy. His mouth watered at the prospect. Here was life! After impregnating his wife according to the party's instructions and traditions, he might even afford an occasional visit to the local parlourhouse of which there was one in every hamlet. In towns of five thousand there were at least three buildings filled with *filles de joie*. Indeed, if he possessed enough rampant cruelty and native dishonesty, he might become a Fascist leader.

In every drab and dirty town, its dwellings askew to the point of suspicion that the architect suffered from cataracts in both eyes, there was one clean and handsome building, usually four storeys high, its granite gleaming and its private power-plant providing for elevators, air conditioning, water and electricity. This was the Fascist headquarters. The two lower floors were used for the business of governing the community. These held the offices of the tax collectors, the propaganda agencies, the labour syndicates, and such other niceties as the League for the Propagation of Large Families. The third floor held the state police, the secret gendarmerie and the assortment of spies and stool-pigeons necessary to the Fascist community.

On the top floor lived the Fascist leader in the style of a nouveau-riche millionaire. During our advance through Sicily and Italy, I visited dozens of these top-floor apartments. They were uniform in their lavishness. Woodstock was fashioned from the forests of the Americas and the Indies. Silk abounded in the bedrooms. The kitchens were lavishly stocked and so were the wine cellars. Monogrammed shirts of the sheerest textures filled the dressers. The plumbing would have put a Waldorf Tower suite to shame and the decor was more suited to the central hall of a middle west museum. In this style the local leader could regard the hovels clustered around him and the vineyards in the valleys below belonging to his absentee collaborators.

This was Fascism as we found it.

If doubt should be cast that such chicanery can exist among people of common blood in a modern European state, consider the peasant population of Sicily and southern Italy. It is ideal raw material for the imposition of fancy Fascist harness. Sicilians are a pleasant enough people. They work hard; they are capable of living and propagating on the minimum essentials for human existence, and they move diffidently about their own country as though someone will come along momentarily and order them off the face of the earth. Most of them are pitifully ignorant of the primary rights of a human being.

They are a small race, the men averaging less than five and one-half feet in height, the women smaller and mysteriously shapeless. By western standards

they are not handsome. Yet they have a peasant graciousness and love for colour. It was common to see a tenant farmer riding behind an undernourished mule which apparently suffered from every ailment known to veterinary science, and yet was unnecessarily loaded with fancy wood trappings decorated on the organ-grinder motif.

Once having subjugated such a people, Fascism found it easy to apply the principle of the perpetuation of poverty and ignorance. A little learning was a dangerous thing for Fascism; therefore rural schooling consisted of a smattering of religious education and a full curriculum of regimentation by military masters. Those whose minds, by some accident of nature, wandered beyond the bounds of serfdom were quickly brought to boot by physical punishment administered in the streets followed by an indefinite spell in the local jail. These frequent demonstrations were sufficient to quiet in these diffident souls the longing which sometimes rose in their throats and played on their lips.

The only undiluted pleasure I felt in the campaign was watching frequently the liberation of political prisoners from vermin-infested jails and the incarceration therein of remaining Fascist leaders still protesting in their fancy-cut suits and silk monogrammed shirts. In the town of Pachino, Canadian security officers dragged a trembling Fascist leader from under his ornate bed and booted him into jail.

In the bigger towns and cities, civilization was of a higher order and Fascist morality of an even lower grade. Community leaders were richer and the middle-class almost obliterated by tax-poverty. Here, however, the spark of hope lingered. Over Fascist signs and symbols the word “Matteoti” was scrawled in red paint. A favourite Fascist poster was an alleged quotation from a certain London newspaper for September 2, 1939, calling on the British government to follow the enlightened neutrality policy of Mussolini’s regime. I saw this on many walls in Catania when we entered the city.

This propaganda was apparently widely disseminated, and among minor leaders in the hinterland there was an impression that the British were not hostile to Fascist practices. When a Canadian formation entered Valguernera, in Sicily, the local leader met the unit commander in the town square, welcomed him and graciously indicated thirty of the town’s women impressed for the pleasure of his troops. The Fascist seemed genuinely upset when the women were returned to their homes, and he was appalled when the commander promptly threw him in jail. He couldn’t understand it. His gallant allies, the Germans, always welcomed a round-up of the town’s comelier women. . . .

Perhaps the most moving experience of my life came on the morning of July 26, sixteen days after our landing in Sicily. I slept the night in a vineyard

four miles short of Leonforte, and reveille on the Monday morning was unadorned pandemonium. I can think of nicer ways of being awakened than the scream of ME 110's lacerating the eardrum and the crackle of machine-guns approaching close, but there is nothing more effective for the lazy riser. In one leap I was out of the blankets and behind the thickest tree in the neighbourhood. Twelve ME's were dropping splinter bombs on a road running past the encampment, and having fired a petrol truck they were scampering around at three hundred feet looking for more targets. By skilful footwork I kept the tree between me and the fighter-bombers, and I halted the nimble gymnastics only when the hum of their motors evaporated in the clear morning sky.

An intelligence officer came from behind another thick tree, slapped my bare bottom, and said, "That's just to remind us they're still fighting."

"Do they have to remind us at this hour of the morning?" I grumbled. "Who's got tea?"

"Maybe you haven't heard the news," he said. "Mussolini's out. He's fired, finished, done. Rome radio announced it at midnight last night."

If I had pants on I would have jumped out of them. Instead, I hopped into shorts, meanwhile listening to details of the Grand Council's decision to dispense with Fascism in Italy.

Leonforte was the nearest town. It had been in our hands two days. The four correspondents in the camp gathered up a Canadian-Italian trooper to act as interpreter and our jeep bounced over the freshly bombed road into the rubble-strewn streets of Leonforte, past the wreckage of a German Mark VI still smelling of bodies inside its blackened shell, until we hit the one wide avenue in the town. There we parked.

People were up and about. Probably they hadn't gone to sleep, because our 25-pounders were deployed just below the town and thundered an all-night barrage on German positions in Nissoria valley.

A little man, his swarthy face lined and weary, wandered aimlessly along the street. On his shabby civilian jacket he wore a brassard with the word "Mayor." Our interpreter buttonholed him, spoke lengthily in Italian. The mayor looked at him, then at us with incredulous eyes.

"It's news to them," the interpreter said. "Nobody in town's heard it. There isn't a radio in the place."

Within seconds a crowd of thirty was around the mayor. A few moments later there were three hundred pushing and gesticulating around the jeep. The interpreter was mobbed. He finally broke through to us and said, "They want to know which radio gave this news. They think it's a trick. Was it London or Rome radio?"

We told him it was Rome radio and that there was no doubt of the official

nature of the news. The interpreter stood on the seat of the jeep and made an announcement. A Lourdes miracle performed before their eyes could not have had more effect on these people.

They blubbered and threw their arms around one another. “Pace! Pace!” (Peace! Peace!) some of them cried to the heavens with hysterical intensity. A few men in the crowd began making violent orations to no one in particular. Women wept and beat their chests, shouting “Pace! Pace!” and running to and fro in search of someone to embrace.

The crowd now numbered more than a thousand. Townsfolk flocked out of their cellars, women with babies bobbling at their breasts, men wearing pyjama tops, all dancing a fandango of excitement around our jeep. They digested the news, discussed it, convinced themselves of its truth. Then they smiled, their eyes glistening with emotion. Here was a poignant moment. These were the first genuine smiles I had seen on the mouths of Sicilians; not the diffident, humourless smile which we saw as our troops bounced through their towns, but a broad smile, full of the birth of new hope.

There was a stir in the centre of the throng, and two men were thrust on the shoulders of their companions. Amid backslaps and cheers and embraces, they were deposited on the ground before me. They were rotted little men, their bodies thin and their eyes dulled. They were the town’s courageous liberals. They fought for the Loyalists in Spain. Deported from France, they spent four years in jail until released by our troops a few days before. They spoke earnestly and lengthily in Italian and though I could not understand what they said (my interpreter was now overwhelmed somewhere in the crowd), their gestures were eloquent enough. They had suffered long for this moment of triumph.

From an ironmonger’s shop near-by came the shout of strident voices and the scuffling of bodies. It seemed a violent argument was developing into a fight. The crowd turned away from me momentarily. Out of the shop tumbled a dozen men, shouting and gesticulating. They had knives and chisels in their hands. The outside wall of the shop was decorated with three stenciled silhouettes of Mussolini. The men leaped at the wall, hacking at it until not a mark of the Duce’s head remained.

We left Leonforte, its streets echoing with cries of “Pace! Pace!” and made for Enna, biggest town in central Sicily.

This American-held town had already heard the news. The streets were thronged. Everywhere men were making speeches, some to audiences, others merely for the benefit of hearing their own voices—as though the privilege of speaking one’s mind was something new and glorious.

When our jeep rolled into the main square, a citizen of Enna stepped down from his speaking perch at the base of a Great War memorial. “I speak

English," he announced. "I lived in Baltimore twenty years. I still have family in Baltimore, Maryland, that's near Washington. Eighteen nephews and nieces and eleven grandchildren—all in Baltimore, Maryland."

I asked him how Enna received the news.

"I cannot tell you," he said, "because you'll never understand. You don't know how it was under the Fascists. No jobs, unless you worked in the fields, except if you belonged to the clique." His arm waved toward the grand Fascist palace rising high and handsome above every building in the town. "Taxes and war and work—that's all we had from them. You had to pay everything to live. It was easier to die—much easier to die. Now p'raps we'll have a chance."

The guns of the continuing battle were echoing over the hills. But in the streets there was dancing.

Mussolini's cardinal sin against the Italian people was left unspoken: He brought war into the fields and homes and towns of Italy. He attempted to infect a mellow people with lust for conquest, and the result was disaster. War has ruined such modest wealth as a long labouring Italy eked out of a stubborn soil, and invasion has left a scar every Italian will carry to the grave.

Invasion is the ultimate degradation of a nation. It does not matter who invades or what priceless gifts of liberty are carried on the vehicles of a benign and enlightened conqueror. Invasion is the last and most desperate of a nation's ordeals. Bombing from the air can be heartless, and shelling from the sea the most devastating arm of destruction; these a nation can withstand and still walk proudly from the graves of the dead. But invasion is more than death and destruction. It is the last insult, the unbearable burden. It strikes not merely at the flesh but at the soul.

Our troops in Italy—British, American, Canadian—are mostly enlightened individuals. No rampant cruelty is bred within them. They know they are on a mission of mercy in its fundamental character. But to a soldier the battle is paramount and the mission is left to those whose concern it is. Italy is their battlefield and they must use it to the full. Dwellings become barricades, cemeteries are machine-gun posts, and vineyards are latrines. Property means nothing. The gun-barrel is the master and the enemy is the guide. The battle swarms over communities and the people must cower in the hills. And when the battle passes, their homes are shattered and their community prostrate. The lilt of life is fled. The wheels of living have been turned back a thousand years. Theirs is an occupied territory. Foreigners, no matter how benevolent, are the governors. Troops, no matter how enlightened, are young and toughened and cocky with conquest. The degradation is unbearable. And yet they must bear it. The mark of defeat is upon them.

This is what Fascism has brought to Italy. The shame of it will ring down the centuries.

Above: “The whole world is watching you. Give the people at home good news and lots of it.” General Montgomery addressing a Canadian tank brigade on the Italian mainland.

Above: “It was Sunday morning in the dusty hills.” A padre celebrates early mass somewhere in Italy.

5
The Allied Commanders

AIR MARSHAL SIR ARTHUR Cunningham, commander of the tactical air force, was blithe as a Noel Coward character when he received the war correspondents on the afternoon of August 10. The spotlight of the campaign now played on him. His planes ranged the three main roads converging on Messina, smashing at retreating German transport, and they patrolled the skies over straits, taking an estimated thirty per cent. toll of barges ferrying the enemy across the two-mile stretch of water to the temporary safety of the Italian mainland.

Sir Arthur was in holiday mood. Not even the hot and dusty Sicilian field over which sprawled the tents of his staff could dull his flair for *bon mots* in the Mayfair manner. He draped his handsome figure against his caravan and entertained us with a monologue on the faults and delights of Generals Alexander, Montgomery and Eisenhower, not forgetting his opponent, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring. Suddenly he stopped to stroke his chin.

"I wonder," he mused, "I wonder if it would be possible to get us all a drink. You'd like a drink, I take it, gentlemen?"

The assembled correspondents coughed and harumphed like a chorus of shipwrecked sailors twenty days in lifeboats.

"Hmm." The Air Marshal thought a moment. Then he snapped his fingers and shouted, "Hi, there! Do you think you could dig up a drink for the correspondents?"

Immediately two orderlies emerged from behind a thicket. One balanced a tray with twenty glasses—exactly the number of the party—and the other carried two bottles of whiskey, soda and water. Sir Arthur beamed like a magician fingering a squirming rabbit. "Help yourselves, gentlemen," he said.

Fifty yards away, General Sir Harold R. L. Alexander sat in his caravan, poring over plans for the next moves of his armies. He lived a spartan existence. Military governor of Sicily he was; but no strutting conqueror. He did not once look in at Cunningham's merry newspaper party. As someone jocularly remarked, he should have been celebrating with lawn parties replete with dancing girls.

General Alexander obviously had no time for lawn parties and dancing

girls. He was wrestling with outside criticism of the slowness of the Sicilian campaign. In addition, he was dipping deep into the well of his Solomon-like judgment to resolve the didoes of the two most temperamental commanders in the Allied list—Montgomery of the Eighth and Lieut.-General George Patton of the United States Seventh Army.

Alexander did well on all counts. He is a small man, not nearly as handsome as his Gable-like photographs indicate, but a great deal more brilliant than his press clippings would reveal. Moreover, he is a prime collector of all the virtues that make up the ideal Britisher. He is naturally modest and just as naturally fearless, excessively gentle and fiercely efficient. He is loath to credit his own troops with more than a job properly done, and he is fulsome in his praise of his allies. He made the ideal deputy in the field for General Eisenhower, because he is one of the few British commanders under whom Americans would fight without restraint or mental reservation.

These qualities probably worked to Alexander's personal disadvantage when Messrs. Roosevelt and Churchill combed the field for Second Front leaders. There were only two commanders in the whole western theatre of war who were suited by temperament and talent to lead large combined forces of British and American troops. One was Eisenhower, the brilliant, plain-spoken mid-western American who became a symbol of military unity without precedent in the history of the English-speaking powers. The other was Alexander. If one was to proceed to London to take charge of the Second Front operation, the other had to remain in the Mediterranean to command the sizable British and American forces still fighting in Italy. Eisenhower was posted to London. Logically, Alexander remained in the Mediterranean.

I don't think Alexander minded being passed over in the selection for the climactic campaign in the west. He isn't an ambitious man. He is definitely in the tradition of the British general who, having lived a useful and successful career in the King's service, retires to a country house in Tunbridge Wells or Ulster and spends his declining years raising tulips, reading detective stories, and writing an occasional letter to *The Times* on the inadequacy of holiday train service between Basingstoke and Henley-on-Thames.

In the fierce light of total war he was more than a little abashed. He obviously doesn't care for correspondents and interviews, but he gives these the same respectful attention a man of his cut gives everyone and everything that comes into contact with him. In a field in which politics and ambition are rampant, he is honest to the point of naiveté. It is this simple integrity no less than his real aptitude for military strategy, that makes him so entirely acceptable to the Americans. To them he is the storied Englishman in whom fair play is a fierce religion.

While American and British formations pursued the Germans along three

roads which made confluence at the Messina moat, the Canadian division rested on the hills overlooking the Catania plain. Its job was completed on the outskirts of Adrano.

During this period of inaction the Canadians were visited by Lieut.-General Andrew G. L. McNaughton, commander of the First Canadian Army, first being not only a number but also a fact. McNaughton created the first army in Canada's history. In the last war Canada's forces never attained status higher than a corps.

McNaughton appeared before his troops a proud, cheerful and energetic man. This was a facade. He was a broken man, confounded by the collusion of circumstance and politics. Not many months later he was to be retired and returned to Canada without having once commanded in the field the army of his creation.

He arrived in Sicily on a blazing day. And like a careworn impressario wandering through a dark and empty theatre long after the curtain has fallen on a presentation of his own creation, McNaughton retraced the path of the Canadian advance from the beaches of Pachino to the foothills of Mount Etna. Though he had not been able to watch the war machine he himself had created as it struck brilliantly through the heart of Sicily, he drew the fullest measure of pride from the scenes of its victories.

There is nothing sentimental about a recent battlefield. It is an ugly mixture of charred stumps, churned earth, slit trenches, fresh graves, shell casings and the litter of personal mementoes belonging to men who no longer have use for them.

But there was something distinctly bittersweet about McNaughton's slight and weary figure moving through the valleys and up the hills over which the First Canadian Division fought.

This was McNaughton's division. He brought it overseas in December, 1939. It was the pride of the Corps he soon commanded, and the anchor of the First Canadian Army he later created. He built it, made it strong and skilful, embellished it with every mechanical device his keen mind could develop. And after three years, when the time came for it to fight, he could not command it. He had become an army general then, and he stood on a quayside and watched the division sail under command of young Major-General Simonds as part of the Eighth Army.

With Simonds as his guide, he examined the cliffs of Assoro and trudged the valley of Agira, pausing here and there before the graves of troops he regarded as his personal charges. He was not deterred by the blazing sun which felled men far more sturdy. His expert eye scanned the battlefields and invested them with the guns and men they knew short weeks before. Better than most men, he recognized the difficulties and could measure the triumph.

The next day he walked through the bivouacs of the division, paid a courtesy visit to Montgomery, and flew back to England. That was as close as McNaughton ever came to standing at the head of Canadian troops on a field of battle. In December, 1943, the Canadian government announced his retirement on the ground of protracted illness. In January he returned to Canada and announced he was quite healthy. But he was very definitely retired. There was no return.

McNaughton is an intense individual, probably more brilliant as a man than as a soldier, and the collapse of his military career may be attributed to the very qualities which made him so colourful a character in early years of the war. He played himself and his hand uniformly—to the full. When Britain's army straggled back from Dunkerque, disorganized and bereft of weapons, he made the world conscious of his Canadian troops standing guard on England's south coast. In the process he became a fabulous figure. It was easy for him to become so. The English-speaking nations, trembling for the future, looked for heroes on whom to pin their last forlorn hopes. One was Churchill. Another was the answer to a propagandist's prayer. His iron-grey head, miraculously photogenic, was the epitome of last-ditch fight. His Canadians, storied of the last war, were the only fully trained and equipped troops on English soil. His words were brave—naturally—because they were manufactured from the tempered steel of his own intense character. Robert Sherwood could have composed no apter phrases. McNaughton was given British divisions to fill out a corps of his own. He was rumoured a candidate for Chief of the Imperial General Staff. In speculation about the Second Front command he was a prime favourite. The golden age of Canadian soldiering seemed to have arrived, and McNaughton was its magic.

I sat in a study of his Corps headquarters in England in September, 1941, when he said, "The Canadian Corps is a dagger pointed at the heart of Berlin." The sentence swirled around the world. I was in a reception-room of the Canadian Legation in Washington in May, 1942, when he told a crowded press conference, "We will give it to the Hun—right in the belly."

McNaughton bolstered his words with ambitious preparation. Canadian recruits streamed across the Atlantic. The General filled out his divisions, trained them rigorously, and finally established the First Canadian Army. In Canada, Mackenzie King's Liberal government, accused of making less than an all-out military effort, pointed with pride. There was McNaughton commanding the first Canadian army in the country's history—the dagger that was going to thrust variously at the heart of Berlin and also give it to the Hun —right in the belly.

The winter of 1942-1943 brought the crisis in McNaughton's career. It had its beginnings in Ottawa. Mr. King's government was being vigorously

prodded on the country's military record which consisted then of Hongkong with total casualties to the one Canadian brigade in the battle, and of Dieppe, a gallant reconnaissance at heavy cost. Meanwhile, the Australians and New Zealanders were covering themselves with glory in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. The Americans, coming into the war two years late, were fighting in full panoply along the North African shore. Only the Canadian Army was inactive. And the finger Mr. King had so recently pointed with pride was now tapping thoughtfully on his hairless scalp.

In England, McNaughton was trying desperately—and very largely successfully—to maintain the morale of his army until such time as circumstance would provide the Second Front. It was not an easy chore. Some troops were in their fourth year of training, many more in their third—an ordeal of waiting without precedent for an army of war-time volunteers. But he felt certain he could rate his men along until the spring of 1944, then have his magnificently-equipped army ready for invasion of Western Europe.

The suggestion from Ottawa that he send part of his forces into the Mediterranean must have filled McNaughton with misgivings. His army—barely an army of minimum size and lacking more than a fringe of reinforcements—could not afford the loss of its best troops. If his judgment in creating an army was to be vindicated, he must keep all his troops in England and hope that the Second Front would eventuate before the government's embarrassment became too acute. But the government wouldn't wait. Ottawa's suggestion became pressure. McNaughton quarrelled with Colonel J. L. Ralston, Mr. King's Minister of National Defence. Finally the General was forced to give way. In the midst of the planning for the Sicily campaign, a British division was deleted from the arrangements and the First Canadian Division inserted.

On the June evening he stood on a quayside and watched his division sail for Sicily, McNaughton also saw his future merge with the grey of the Atlantic. Thereafter Canadian troops streamed to the Mediterranean. In the autumn of 1943 Canadian strength in Italy had reached corps proportions. In England, McNaughton's dagger had become more handle than blade. His quarrel with Ralston burned fiercely and confidence between the men was consumed. At Teheran the Second Front came formally into being, and Montgomery returned to England to take within his command the rump of McNaughton's Canadian Army. No spearhead this. The Canadian's brave words of 1941 were a hollow laugh in 1944. His photogenic head no longer fulfilled the promise of the rotogravures. He grew old and passive. Then he fell ill.

But his illness was not of the body. He suffered from a broken heart.

The perfect character is rarely the perfect success. An ingenuous alchemy

is required for propulsion along the paths of glory in this complicated world—a delicate mixture of strength and pliability, frankness and intrigue, honesty and opportunism, kindliness and cruel decision. General Dwight David Eisenhower has all of these in their proper proportions. He is by far the most impressive commander I have studied in the Allied list. By no accident has he become the responsible head of the greatest military venture ever launched by history's strongest coalition of nations.

He has a vivid awareness of his place in history. "I am not an American commander," he says. "I am an Allied commander." Behind his desk, whether in Algiers or London, stand three flags—the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack, and the four-star emblem denoting his rank.

It is a demonstration of the infinite variety of Mother Earth that the same American Middle West that spawned Colonel Robert R. McCormick should have also produced in Eisenhower a symbol of English-speaking unity without precedent in the history of the British and American nations. Never before has an American carried the full and unreserved confidence of British forces; never before has an American so plainly Anglophile retained the complete faith of his own people. He is more than a symbol of unity; he is its most ruthless practitioner. An American officer who utters a pointed joke about the British in a bar in Algiers may find himself mysteriously transferred back to the United States. An Englishman who mumbles in his beard about the Americans goes just as quickly. Eisenhower likes no jokes except those that make him laugh. Anglo-American grumbling of any kind doesn't make him laugh.

He has no prejudices except for the inefficient and the enemy. There was an incident involving his brother, Milton Eisenhower, at a Washington party, widely reported at the time. A matron, thinking quite innocently of the General's possible candidature for the Presidency, fluttered to Milton and said, "Your brother is making amazing headway in his career. It's a pity you're Jewish." "Madam," Eisenhower replied severely, "it's a pity we're not." For the enemy the General has all the white hatred necessary to ruthless prosecution of the war. In July, 1942, when he was appointed to command United States forces in the European theatre of operations, he told his first press conference, "My job is to smash Germany." He hissed the sentence through his teeth in a manner that sent shivers down the spines of his listeners.

He is not always intense. One day at Salerno, when fighting was at its most exciting stage, he paid a three-hour visit with Lieut.-General Clark. I stood close to him when he climbed into a "duck" for transfer to his destroyer. "By the way, Mark," he yelled as the vehicle edged into the water, "get me Naples, will you? I want a luxury hotel next time I visit you."

His handling of the press is shrewder than any prominent figure save President Roosevelt. After the fall of Tunis, reporters attached to his

headquarters in Algiers were speculating widely on the next possible move. This disturbed Eisenhower. He was afraid they might guess right. So he called in all accredited correspondents a full month before the Sicily operation and told them in confidence the time and place for the invasion of Italy. "I did that to cut off speculation. If they know, they can't divulge it. And newspapermen will not deliberately write a false story for their papers." It worked.

He did not try the same system on the Second Front operation. He issued a blanket order forbidding all speculation on the time, the method, the places of contact and the forces involved. "There's one thing, however, that will never be censored at my headquarters," he added. "That is criticism of myself. You can go to town on that."

Eisenhower's talent for commanding a force in the field is an unknown quantity. His experience is limited to the short-lived French resistance in North Africa. Since then his function has been mainly to transfer into terms of military potential the politico-military decisions of Roosevelt and Churchill. He is the connecting link between the chiefs of Allied governments and the chiefs of Allied army formations. When an operation is underway, he steers the overall military effort along the lines of guidance laid down by Roosevelt and Churchill. He is not a student of politics; he is a military interpreter of political trends.

When Italy made her decision to surrender late in August, 1943, Eisenhower took charge of negotiations. Within bounds of the terms set forth by Roosevelt and Churchill at the Quebec conference, Eisenhower was called upon to arrange the peace in a manner most advantageous to his attacking armies. That he was not entirely successful was due less to his arrangements than to the limp backbone of the Italian people. He is philosophical in failure, modest in success. Responsibility sits easily on his square shoulders. He is a full general in every sense of the term.

Real hero of the Eisenhower saga is General George C. Marshall, United States Chief of Staff. It was Marshall who spied a streak of genius behind the strictly average exterior of the pumpkin-faced midwesterner, plucked him out of an army camp in San Antonio, Texas, February, 1942, and set him up on the pedestal of history. This was no mean feat. Because the unadorned case history of D. D. Eisenhower, West Point '15, had all the earmarks of slow progression into obscurity.

Not even Mrs. Eisenhower could have dreamed what lay in store for her husband. She married him in 1916 because she loved him, not because of his rank. He was a first lieutenant. He didn't get across the ocean in the first World War. Instead he commuted as an instructor between Fort Houston, Texas, and Camp Colt, Pennsylvania. By 1920 he had become a major in the small and forgotten army of disarmament's dream days. And a major he remained. For

sixteen weary years—from the ages of thirty to forty-six—he failed to get a promotion. Who could have suspected his career was not bogged in a hopeless mire? Not Major and Mrs. Eisenhower. The man does not live who can plod to work day in and day out for sixteen years without a promotion and yet envision a future rosier than a modest pension.

In 1936, things began to creak along for Major Eisenhower. He became a lieut.-colonel. In 1941, life began to move; he was made a full colonel in March and a brigadier-general in September. In 1942 his career became a race with fame; he was a major-general in March and a lieut.-general in July. And in 1943, lightning struck. He was a full general. The man who at the age of forty-six was a hopelessly rutted major had become at fifty-three commander of the greatest military force in English-speaking history. When does life begin?

It is not that Eisenhower was an inept student during his years as a junior officer. In 1921 he graduated from an Infantry Tank School with high honours. And in 1926 he completed a course at Fort Leavenworth's Command and Staff School as first student in his class. These attainments in military scholarship, however, brought no immediate rewards, and he was moved from one minor job to another for nearly ten years.

In 1935 something happened which was to affect radically his career. He was sent to the Philippine Islands as Assistant Military Adviser to the Commonwealth. He was there when Britain declared war on Germany and, more significantly, when Japan signed her agreements with the Axis. Eisenhower set about writing a report on defence of the Philippines. It was an exhaustive appreciation of 125,000 words which came to be studied by General MacArthur and the War Department in Washington. In the tense Pacific situation, the report was kept within easy reach.

In November, 1940, Eisenhower was returned to the United States. He was Chief of Staff of the Third Army, San Antonio, when the Pearl Harbour attack smashed to the centre of American consciousness.

As the battle of the Philippines moved its tragic, relentless course to forlorn defence in the Bataan Peninsula, General Marshall took up the Report on Defence of the Philippines written years back by one Lieut.-Colonel D. D. Eisenhower. He was transfixed by its prescience. It foretold with uncanny precision the Japanese plan of attack, and the dangers, the pitfalls, the only possible resistance of American forces in the islands. This Eisenhower, whoever he was, was a brilliant soldier. Here was the proof.

On February 16, 1942, Eisenhower hurriedly transferred from San Antonio to Washington to become Chief of the War Plans Division, War Department General Staff. Within weeks all Washington buzzed with the brilliance of the best planner War Department officials could remember. Four months after his

arrival in Washington, he was appointed Commanding General of the United States forces in the European Theatre of Operations. Since then his career has been front page news.

To such a man, harnessed most of his fifty-three years to a workaday modesty, the thundering impact of sudden fame and power should have betrayed embarrassments in his behaviour and an inbred gawkishness in the seat of the mighty. It did not, and this is probably the most phenomenal circumstance surrounding the man. Lord Louis Mountbatten couldn't have accepted honour and sceptre with easier grace or with a more natural approach to responsibility. Eisenhower stepped into greatness as though he had known it all his life. The man who was born in Denison, Texas, was brought up by a widowed mother in Abilene, Kansas, and was variously a cowpuncher, a professional baseball player and a farmer—not forgetting sixteen years a major—ascended the pedestal of history without a tremor or a deep breath.

He has probably the most complicated job in the centre stage of the war. From the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington he receives military guidance; and from representatives of Churchill and Roosevelt, he takes political guidance. The course he follows thereafter is his own. Some evidence of its vast complication was shown in North Africa when he wrestled simultaneously with a vexatious military campaign and a political situation which is most vividly described simply by the word French.

There is no corroboration that on the moment he heard of Admiral Darlan's assassination, he murmured to a colleague, "We can't allow that sort of thing." Then, as an afterthought, "Somehow, you know, the headache I had yesterday seems a lot better today." True or not, the story reveals Eisenhower's secret of success.

His greatest strength is the plainest quality of his mid-western American tradition. He uses common horse sense.

6

Peace Comes to Sicily

ON AUGUST 16, A DAZZLING day, I stood on the heights of Taormina. A wisp of sea-breeze toyed with the trees and they twinkled in the afternoon sun. The terrace of the Hotel Miramare was an eerie perch hewn out of the top hills of this ancient settlement like a balcony suspended perilously over the Mediterranean. Across the water—seventeen miles was as nothing in this crystal atmosphere—the toe of Italy shimmered in midsummer heat. Over my shoulder the peak of Etna lay against the blue in utter contentment.

The vista was ridiculously beautiful. The mind didn't believe the eyes, and even now denies truth to the memory. This—after a five weeks' pilgrimage with dust and poverty and death—this was Taormina. Surely the rich and the royalty of Europe knew how to live! Here was their southernmost playground, their winter haven preliminary to a season on the Lido and the Riviera. The bathing beach was a tiny white inlet in the rocky coast far below. On the heights the fine hotels stood empty, their windows boarded against the passing storm of war, their caretakers lounging outside the gates, as though this were merely off-season and the old Europe was going to live again. They were like incredulous widows proudly, stubbornly waiting for their men to return from the conflict.

It cannot be said that the guns of war are impartial. The luxury hotels of Taormina were untouched, while on the other side of Etna the towns of the peasantry were naked ruins. Nor was this entirely accidental. The German High Command used some of the hotels early in the campaign and had left them intact except for a few removable items of loot. Our air force spared the hotels. So did Montgomery's guns, because the General intended to use Taormina as his own headquarters. He did not; it was discovered that the bizarre nature of the location made for faulty wireless signals.

Thus the playground of Europe's wealthy derelicts was spared—all except the lower town at the foot of the cliffs. The railway station was burned out and the homes of the townspeople were askew with shellfire. Retreating German engineers had demolished a wide stretch of the coastal road winding along the base of the cliffs. So effective was this destruction that the road disappeared entirely; the cliffs made a sheer descent into the sea. British troops pursuing

the enemy toward Messina were forced to make a detour by water. Our landing craft could be seen putting out from Taormina docks and steaming around the bend of the coast.

I watched them from the heights; they were like toy ships lolling on a green pond. Suddenly the clear blue sky was spattered with jots of black smoke. Two Messerschmidts banked low over the ships like gulls at play. Their bombs fell wide. Our anti-aircraft was buffeting them severely. They sheered off and disappeared over the Italian mainland as promptly as they came.

That was the last tremor of resistance in the battle of Sicily. The next morning American troops streamed into Messina from the west, followed closely by British troops pushing up from the south. The conquest of the island was complete.

In the sleepy upper town of Taormina, an aged native trudged into the main square, carefully selected two sheets from a roll of paper under his arm, and slapped these on the town's official notice board. One was a picture of President Roosevelt, the other of Prime Minister Churchill.

The campaign over, the Catania plain took on the appearance of a picnic ground on a summer Sunday afternoon. Our troops were bivouacked on fields over which they had fought short weeks before. Temporary graves dotted the landscape; they were marked by a rough wooden cross and a rusty identity disc swinging gently from the crossbar. But those who survived were in holiday mood. The men promoted sports meets and donkey races, lolled naked on the beaches, or frolicked into Catania to fill the wine and barber shops. Officers organized regimental dinners, embellished with champagne and Italian orchestras.

The jeep in which I rode into Catania on a Saturday afternoon looked like a motorized hayride. Including one officer who sat on the engine hood, there were seven of us clustered on the little vehicle. I was reminded of a jaloppy I used to drive around the campus at college. We laughed and sang as we drove past the Catania cemetery, its tombstones smashed and scattered by bomb and shellfire, then under Mussolini's imposing victory arch, and across city hall square with its famous elephant statue miraculously intact. Our mission was to shop for drinks and luxury foods to adorn a regimental dinner table that night. The party consisted of four staff officers from headquarters, two captains of the Edmonton Regiment, notoriously the toughest combat unit in the division, and myself.

Our first stop was a modest wine shop in a working-class district. The aged proprietor, obviously frightened by the sight of seven broad-shouldered Canadians, six of them with revolvers dangling from their belts, promptly produced an assortment of marsala and vermouth at three shillings sixpence

the bottle. The price, we thought, was fair enough but the wares did not entice us. We had tasted too much sweet wine in the hinterland towns during the advance. What we wanted was French champagne; better still, brandy. The proprietor, still smiling diffidently, opened his arms and shook his head. He had nothing but wine.

We moved on to two other wine shops. The proprietors displayed their stocks to us and complained bitterly about German looting. They had only cheap wine. And as for food, they were depending on us to supply them. Not a package of spaghetti was available in any grocer's shop.

Finally we approached a goggle-eyed member of the carabinieri having his shoes shined on the Via Mussolini. We had language difficulties, of course. He spent ten minutes explaining to us that the better class of loose women fled the bombardment and had not yet returned to town; therefore he could not help us. It was only after frantic excursions into the sign language that it dawned upon him we were looking for drinks and viands, not for fleshpots. His big eyes sparkled with the light of superior knowledge. Carefully he produced paper and pencil and wrote down an address, cautioning us to ask for Bertha.

Bertha was a German woman, svelte, blonde and pretty despite her middle age. In response to our impatient knocking, she emerged from behind red and white striped curtains and unlocked a steel-reinforced door. We piled into a shop which would have done credit to the grocery division of Macy's, New York. The counters were chrome-edged and the shelves bulged with peace-time displays of Hennessy three-star, Lanson '28, English pickles, American tinned goods, Indian relishes and Brooklyn spaghetti. Bertha, it turned out, was the black-market queen of Catania.

She spoke English fairly well and she was perfectly self-assured despite the looks of delight both lecherous and culinary which lit our faces. We asked the price of Hennessy. Bertha spoke sharply in Italian to an old woman behind the counter. A bottle was produced for our examination. Also a tin of American grapefruit slices.

"Five pounds for the brandy; one pound ten shillings for the grapefruit," Bertha announced coldly.

We retreated to the back of the shop and went into a huddle. The prices were ridiculous; certainly far beyond our collective means at the time. We elected as our spokesman a headquarters major, a football star in his college days and a very tough-looking individual in battledress and revolver.

"We'll give you two pounds each for three bottles of brandy," he said. "That's eight hundred lira, more than double the market price."

Bertha smiled disdainfully. "Five pounds," she said with most self-possessed politeness.

"Two pounds, damn it," our spokesman reiterated.

"I'm afraid we can't do business," Bertha said in the grand manner.

Our spokesman shrugged his shoulders and proceeded toward the door. We followed, sheep-like. In a moment we were on the street and Bertha, still smiling graciously, had clicked the lock.

Standing beside the jeep, I addressed our little assemblage. "So you're the tough Canadians—haw! Cowed by a couple of women and chased out of a shop like a lot of whipped children. This one takes the cake."

"Well, you can't go robbing women," one of them growled.

"Robbing—no. But we could have put down what we thought the brandy was worth, plus a handsome profit, and walked out with it. What would seven Germans have done in the same spot? A fine lot of conquerors you are!"

"Aw, shut up," they said as we drove away. We had our regimental dinner on compo rations and native wine. No brandy.

The period of relaxation for our troops was a period of partial recovery for some Sicilian people. Their relief in discovering that the Anglo-American monsters of Fascist propaganda were in reality good-natured souls was followed by a wave of profiteering. Merchants in Catania increased prices three hundred per cent. in two weeks and were waxing rich. Housewives did a roaring laundry business. My own laundry, done by a farmer's wife in a little house on the Catania plain, cost more than I paid at London's Savoy. No one thought of protesting.

Along the seashore between Catania and Taormina, it was bank holiday with war-time overtones. Our troops strolled arm in arm with local girls. Our jeeps and trucks were filled with refugees being returned to their homes. Thousands of Italian troops, unofficially released by our forces, wandered around morosely in their bedraggled uniforms.

The Lentini symphony orchestra insisted on playing an eventide concert for the headquarters staff of the First Canadian Division. The music was delightful, except when the concert closed with a rendition of "God Save the King." While we stood stiffly at attention, the Lentini orchestra played the music as though it were a Puccini overture. The middle section was repeated three times and the last four bars were flourished interminably like the close of a Beethoven symphony. We thought we would never relax from our attitude of attention. I recognized a strain of "Deutschland Uber Alles" in the rendition. The musicians were apparently confused by the pace of the war.

It is not my intention to give the impression that the end of fighting and the behaviour of our troops transformed Sicily into a rich and happy island. Merchants who made money in the Catania and Palermo areas were an infinitesimal percentage of a ruined and scattered population. Amgot officials in small hinterland towns found their offices besieged by men begging food, a place for their families to live, and the merest hope for the future. We had

smashed Fascism and with it the system of economic slavery. Now the liberated slaves swarmed about the chariot wheels of the conqueror and asked, "What do we do? How do we pick up the thread of life?" After twenty-one years of Fascist discipline, these people were lost in the halls of their liberty. It was not an easy problem. There was much suffering in Sicily.

If the behaviour of our troops was on the whole exemplary, we did not lack the usual quota of misfits. We had amongst us the bullies, the vindictive, the drunks, the over-sexed, the looters, the young and thoughtless. Stern punishment was meted out to those caught transgressing the strict code of warfare laid down for our forces, with the result that the population came to know a degree of security certainly unique in the long history of invasion.

One faultless morning late in August the placid air was rent by a woman's scream, horrendous and chilling. A few of us dashed out of the manor house we had requisitioned. The scream, coming from the house of a tenant farmer, was repeated again. An officer grabbed his pistol belt and we ran toward the scene of mayhem. A woman lurched out of the house, her face distorted with agony. She was a stubby peasant type and she was beating her chest with both fists, then flailing them to the skies. She stumbled toward us, screaming and wailing with rare virtuosity. Then she fell upon me and spoke words that were drowned in emotion.

I looked helplessly about me for aid which, thank Heaven, came galloping out of the vineyard in the form of her husband. By this time a French-Canadian officer who could speak Italian joined the anxious group. We waited breathlessly for details of the tragedy. Was it murder? Rape? Had a drunken trooper dishonoured her daughter and flung her babies into the well?

"No," said the French-Canadian officer, "she just counted her chickens and she discovered one missing. If it is not produced immediately, she says, she'll complain to Amgot."

On the morning of August 27 the character of life on the Catania plain was suddenly changed. Gone were the laughter and lolling. The road north to Messina hummed with the wheels of armoured vehicles. "Ducks" moved in convoys of sixty toward the narrow waters. Every inlet was jammed with troops and landing craft. The Eighth Army was on the move once more. The assault on the Italian mainland was being prepared.

That afternoon a signal from Algiers informed our newspaper group that a place was open for one correspondent with Lieut.-General Clark's Fifth Army in North Africa—mission unknown; correspondent to report at Algiers on August 29. I elected to make the jump from the Eighth Army to the Fifth. It was not an easy decision to make; first, because I could see our own preparations for assault on Italy, and second, because thirty-six hours was precious little time for a war-time hop from the centre of Sicily to Algiers. War

correspondents travel by air on priority three, which is hardly more than a permit to hitch-hike.

Piling a bedroll and my typewriter into a jeep, I drove to Catania airdrome, which had been taken over by American Transport Command. A lieutenant young enough to be in high school said he had nothing going to Africa that day but he could get me a flip to Palermo. That wasn't good enough. I decided to try an airport near Lentini which was being used by the R.A.F. as an evacuation base for hospital planes. Here I was lucky. A hospital plane was being loaded as I came to the field, and I cajoled an unwilling captain to give me sitting space for the hop to El Aloein, Tunis. Ninety-five minutes later I was in Tunis, but I had missed the day's last plane for Algiers.

I slept the night in Hotel Majestic, the best in Tunis, now a transit camp for British officers. It seems that the British, having entered Tunis ahead of the Americans, requisitioned the Majestic for themselves, leaving second choice to their allies. This was simple justice. In Algiers, which the Americans captured, the Hotel Aletti was requisitioned for U.S. officers. The British had to be content with a minor hotel on a side street. There is, as you see, more than national pride in an army's anxiety to be first to occupy a large community.

The next day was the 29th, date of required arrival in Algiers. At six in the morning I was at Tunis airport, flicking my priority three in the face of a harried sergeant and trying to convince him that General Eisenhower would be dreadfully annoyed if I didn't show up in Algiers that day.

"Look, brother," moaned the boy from Brooklyn—obviously, "about ten thousand guys and their uncles has got to get to Algiers, and they all got to get there today. An' if they don't all get there today, Eisenhower's goin' to be fit to be tied. That's the position, see? Now I got my job and it's simple as one two three. First, I get the one priorities away, then the twos if I got planes enough. If there's no more ones and twos, the threes go. So be a good fella and let's see what happens, eh, bud?"

The ordeal was dreadful. I had left a live operation in Sicily for a shot in the dark and I could think of nothing more desperate than missing the Fifth Army's operation, except possibly the mood of my managing editor. Few editors back home realize the complications of a war correspondent in a theatre of war. Some of them think you flip your press card and walk into a battle like the drama critic strolling by a ticket-taker on an opening night.

After the third Algiers plane had loaded and left—it was now eight a.m.—I wrestled my way through to a lieutenant who seemed to hold a position of authority at the airport. He listened to my story with practised sympathy. "Sure I'll get you away," he whispered. "Next plane."

I heaved my baggage into a waiting plane, collapsed on a bucket seat and prayed for the doors to shut. One is never certain of getting away until the

doors are shut and the plane is on the runway. Too often a priority one or two arrives at the last moment, and some unlucky "three" is ditched. But this trip seemed to be assured. The doors were shut, the plane roared into the wind, and we were away. Thankfully I buried my nose in a two-months-old copy of *Time*.

Twenty minutes out of Tunis, I sensed we were losing altitude. A glance out of the porthole confirmed my worst fears. We were circling over an airdrome. Three minutes later we rolled to a stop. When the doors were opened, a captain stuck head and shoulders into the plane and announced, "All priority threes will please leave the ship." We were at Bizerte!

The despatching officer shook his head sadly. "I don't know why Tunis put you on that plane. They knew damn well you'd be bumped here. They just got you outa their hair and into mine."

I sat on my bedroll for four hours and watched planes wing in and out of the airport. The priority three overflow had now grown to more than a hundred impatient officers. The despatcher was a nervous wreck. He cursed Tunis, cursed Algiers, and regarded us painfully, like a bachelor bequeathed an orphan asylum. My hysterical overtures left him cold. And so I sat in the flaming sun, my face contorted with anxiety, and waited for a miracle. A ground crew corporal passed me. "What's the matter, bud? Sick?" he flipped.

Here was the germ of an idea. I unstrapped my bedroll and extracted therefrom a blanket and my battledress blouse. I donned the latter over my bush shirt, then wrapped the blanket around me, Indian fashion. The heat was intense. Perspiration rolled into my eyes and made them bloodshot. Inevitably a fellow transient inquired solicitously. "Sick?" I nodded and heaved a deep breath.

By the time the despatcher took notice of my strange behaviour, I was genuinely ill with heat.

"What's the matter, cap?" he asked.

"Dunno," I mumbled. "Think I got a touch of malaria. I'm cold as ice. Just came from Sicily. Must've got bitten."

It worked. A full colonel was bumped from the next plane and I was lifted in. The despatcher even carried my baggage to the ship.

By nightfall I was down at Maison Blanche, Algiers. I raced to a telephone and got Colonel J. V. McCormick, chief press officer, on the line.

"Aw, hell, take it easy," he said. "You've got three or four days yet."

There must be a higher justice. The next morning I failed to move from my cot. A medical officer, summoned to my bedside, examined me briefly, then said, "Dysentery. Bad case." Three days and twenty-four pills later, I was barely able to stand on my feet unaided when the call came. I was whisked away to join the Fifth Army.

“Like a careworn impressario . . .” General A. L. G. McNaughton visits Canadian troops in Sicily shortly before his retirement from active command of the First Canadian Army.

7

Destination—Salerno Bay

AUGUST 17 WAS A RED-LETTER day on the front pages of the Allied world. At first light on that day, patrols of the United States Seventh Army entered Messina. Word flashed triumphantly to the outside world. The Sicilian campaign was over. On the afternoon of that day, President Roosevelt arrived in Quebec to begin his formal conferences with Prime Minister Churchill and Canada's Premier Mackenzie King. Tens of thousands of words, descriptive and speculative, crackled over the wires from the ancient capital on the St. Lawrence.

On that evening, in a drab and dusty encampment somewhere in North Africa, a signals runner handed into the headquarters office a two-word code message. Lieut.-General Mark Wayne Clark, commander of the Fifth Army, looked at it, summoned his chief of staff, Major-General Alfred M. Gruenther.

The message instructed General Clark to put into immediate operation the Salerno Bay plan.

Within thirty minutes the encampment spun with activity. Staff officers moved on the double between their own tents and General Clark's headquarters. In the men's quarters the rumours spread quickly. They were going to move. Where and exactly when, they did not know; but it was action—and soon.

They had been waiting many months for this moment. Months filled with vicious training under Africa's hot sun. Months filled with some mystery, as the United States Fifth Army became officially the Fifth Army and British officers drifted in to become part of the organization. Now the waiting was over. The order was for speed. Time was desperately short.

Staff officers swore softly as they waded into reams of operational instructions taken out of a sealed box. The Fifth Army was ready for action—but ordering the Salerno Bay show to be ready for assault landing anytime after September 3 was a bit thick. Even for a poised army, eighteen to twenty-five days was a painfully short period in which to lift divisions from many concentration areas in Africa and transport them across substantial waters to a split-second rendezvous in the heart of Italy. Unit commanders down to junior officers had to be instructed in the minutest details of the landing. Navy and air

had to be thoroughly co-ordinated with the army. A single copy of operational instructions made a thicker volume than Webster's Unabridged. All this had to be translated into action in from eighteen to twenty-five days.

The Salerno Bay plan had, of course, been worked out many months ago. It was one of perhaps two dozen plans completed in every detail for landings on various parts of the Italian mainland. In this strange and spectacular war, plans must be made for every eventuality. The future is unpredictable even for the Roosevelt-Churchill hierarchy. In this spirit the Fifth Army accepted the consequences when a two-word code message pulled the Salerno Bay plan out of the slot.

Junior officers, looking at the plan for the first time, whistled softly. "This," one of them said, "is the pay-off show in the Mediterranean."

About 180 miles due north of Cap d'Orlando, Sicily, lies the Bay of Salerno. Its sheltered waters lap on a firm sandy beach stretching about twenty-five miles from its northern anchor at the city of Salerno (peace-time population 120,000) to its southern flank which is shielded by mountains running into the sea at the fishing village of Agropoli. The beach is sandy two to three hundred yards inland, after which it merges into level farmland six to twelve miles in depth. This is the Salerno plain, enclosed by towering mountains and the sea.

Twenty-five miles north-west of Salerno city lies the great port of Naples. Between them rises a mountain range cut only by two narrow passes.

The capture of Naples, therefore, involved two distinct operations: (1) the establishment of the Salerno beachhead, and (2) the drive through the mountain passes onto the plain of Naples and the port city beyond.

The exhilaration felt by the Fifth Army staff on being ordered into action was not unmixed with apprehension. This was the most daring plan yet put into operation against Fortress Europe. For the first time since Dieppe an Allied force would be landing against almost immediate German opposition; perhaps not on the beaches (it was hoped) but certainly shortly afterwards. It was known there were at least three German divisions in the Naples area.

Because there was no adequate port within the area of assault, the initial force would have to be smaller than that which stormed the Sicilian beaches. For the first time since our Mediterranean offensive started, an Allied force would go into battle without guarantee of air superiority, not even air equality.

Salerno Bay was about two hundred airline miles from the nearest Allied fighter bases in Sicily—beyond the accepted range of effective fighter cover. The Germans had air bases at Montecorvino, on the edge of Salerno plain; at Naples, twenty-five miles away; and at Foggia, the latter fields so dispersed we had not been able to knock them out. The problems of the army were matched by the tasks of the air force.

Only the naval role seemed comfortably assured of success. We had substantial control of the Mediterranean; a combined Anglo-American naval force could readily guarantee to deposit the army on the beaches. Mention of the sizable Italian fleet at Leghorn and Spezia brought only a sardonic smile to the lips of Vice-Admiral Henry K. Hewitt, U.S.N., a fighting sailor. He remarked he didn't know of any Allied warship, battleship or motor torpedo-boat, that wouldn't relish the appearance of the Italian Navy—and the sooner the better.

Lieut.-General Mark Wayne Clark, six feet four, thin as a rail, quiet-spoken, was highly conscious of his responsibility. He had been in tight spots before. This man, in appearance a veritable Tower of Pisa among men of ordinary size, had organized the forces of freedom in French North Africa long before General Eisenhower's armies moved in last November. "When it comes to ops," said an aide-de-camp, "the boss likes 'em tough."

"The boss" also knew he was the first American general to have under his direct command a large British force. His was the first truly international army.

In North Africa last spring, the United States Second Corps had worked in close co-operation with General Kenneth Anderson's British First Army but it was not, in theory or in practice, a part of the First Army. The Fifth was the first British-American Army and Clark, soldier and diplomatist, was stepping into history as its commander.

On September 1, the plans and preparations were completed. Landing craft and troopships were crowded stem to stern in every Allied port of the western Mediterranean. Excited tommies and doughboys crowded the rails. They awaited only the signal to move.

At the same time, in the Catania-Messina area, General Montgomery's Eighth Army was awaiting the signal to move across to the toe of Italy. Elsewhere in Sicily, Marshal Badoglio's representatives were making capitulation arrangements with the Allies. Both events were to have a profound effect on the Salerno Bay operation.

On a sundown some time after September 1, the Fifth Army set sail from many ports. The men eagerly anticipated adventure. They were to get it—in greater measure than they anticipated. They were to know the fury of Dieppe, the heartbreak of Gallipoli, and the exhilaration of desperate triumph.

On a faultless evening early in September, a U.S. Navy ship was tied up at the dock of a Mediterranean port. Formerly she was a modest passenger liner now converted to very specialized war use. On the boat deck a portable movie projector was showing an old Hollywood film—"Strange Cargo," starring Joan Crawford and Clark Gable—to a mixed audience of American sailors and British and American military personnel.

The film ended in the customary flurry of drama and excitement; then we

all went below decks, muttering the usual comments—"pretty good picture" . . . "slow at the beginning but it certainly held you spellbound toward the end" . . . "damned exciting adventure."

Ten minutes later, unbeknown to most of us below, the ship moved slowly from the dock, out into mid-harbour, and then into the gathering darkness of the Mediterranean, bound for a breathless adventure and carrying as strange a cargo as ever jammed a vessel of the United States Navy.

This was the *U.S.S. Ancon*, headquarters ship of the Fifth Army, the nerve centre of the Salerno Bay armada now steaming out of many ports for a rendezvous somewhere at sea. Aboard her were British and American soldiers, wearing their distinctive uniforms but carrying identical patches high on the left sleeve—the lettering 5-A set against a mosque silhouette. Loping, weatherbeaten Texans walked with stiffly erect Guards officers. The ward rooms were a babel of clipped Oxford and Yankee twang, Scottish burr and mellow Carolinian, blurting Tennessean and undertoned Mayfairisms. This was the first British-American army since the Indian wars of mid-eighteenth century.

Also aboard were Lieut.-General Mark Wayne Clark, Army commander, and Vice-Admiral Henry K. Hewitt, U.S.N., directing all naval operations for the expedition. Twenty-six British army officers, including two brigadiers, travelled with General Clark. Eight British naval officers were included in Admiral Hewitt's party.

Deep in the bowels of the ship, heavily guarded even after we set sail, was the War Room. A map ten feet high and twenty feet wide covered the forward wall. On it was marked the location of every Allied ship between Gibraltar and Tripoli, Spezia and Sousse. Every concentration of Allied troops and planes was clearly indicated as to strength and direction of movement. The map was cut by lines moving from almost every direction and converging on the area of Salerno Bay.

Teletyped messages were flashed on screens liberally dispersed all over the room so that each staff officer looking up from his work could see in a flash the latest move. When I first entered the room I recalled the floor of the New York Stock Exchange on a three-million-share day. The War Room was a miniature.

The ship moved through the night alone. Shortly before dawn an Aldis light flashed on the bridge. It was answered by a twinkling light some miles away. In the War Room the huge map was remarked. And in the grey light of early morning a convoy of several dozen ships moved off our port side, steaming eastward. The assault force was gathering.

For thirty-six hours our ship was the Pied Piper of the Mediterranean. Convoys moved over the horizon and took their places in the armada with

parade-ground precision. Soon the headquarters ship was centre of a dazzling panorama of troopships, tank and infantry landing craft, and warships almost as far as the eye could see. Destroyers raced around the edges of the convoy like terriers at play. Huge warships steamed menacingly on our flanks.

Late on Wednesday afternoon, September 8, less than twelve hours to zero hour, the convoy was complete. We were now steaming due eastward off the northern coast of Sicily. If enemy eyes were peering at us from reconnaissance planes, they might have suspected we were making for the toe of Italy to support the Eighth Army which had, since September 3, gained a substantial bridgehead across the Straits of Messina.

"Do you think we've been spotted by the enemy?" I asked Admiral Hewitt on the bridge that afternoon.

"If we haven't, they're blind," he replied as he scanned the sea covered with hundreds of our ships.

Destination of the expedition was still a matter for intense speculation on board. Only a few knew we were headed for Salerno Bay. But it was clear to most, as it must have been to the enemy, that the objective was Naples. We needed the port. Italy was tottering. The Eighth Army had a firm hold on the toe. There was a tense atmosphere on board—too tense for anything but a most daring assault.

I remembered, too, the remark made by a staff officer when I expressed some envy for the war correspondents covering the (then) big story across Messina Straits. "Oh," he grunted, "you're going on a *much* more interesting show." Obviously Naples was indicated.

Early on Wednesday afternoon, September 8, the three war correspondents aboard—Quentin Reynolds of *Collier's*, Reynolds Packard of United Press, and myself—were summoned to the War Room. A tall, tough, prematurely grey American colonel led us through a guarded door on the side. He opened a huge map-case, let the flap fall.

"There it is," he said. "We attack at 0330 tomorrow morning. What do you think of it?"

We looked at a magnified map of Salerno Bay.

Heavily underlined was the Sele River running from the mountains, across the plain and into the sea, cutting the Salerno beach almost exactly in half.

"The Americans," said the colonel, "will land south of the Sele. The British north of the Sele. Their job is to move inland and capture Battipaglia which, as you see, is the most important road junction in the beachhead. The Americans will take Paestum and clear Mount Soprano which dominates the beach. The Commandos and Rangers have got the toughest job. They'll land at Vietri and Maiori and move up to secure the two mountain passes leading to the Naples plain. Then the axis of our assault will shift left. The Americans will move into

the British area, and the British will push on to support the Rangers and Commandos. We'll try to push through to the Naples plain and go for the port."

There were coastal defences, including a big railway gun near the beach, but these it was felt offered no great difficulty. They would be taken out quickly. More serious was the fact (divulged by an Intelligence Officer) that there were three German divisions in the immediate Naples area (the 15th and 16th Panzer Grenadiers and the 29th Motorized Division). These might be dispersed by a naval cover plan which was then sweeping up around d'Isehia Island to give the impression our landing would be effected in the Bay of Gasta, just above Naples.

But most serious was the question of air support. Spitfires, flying from Sicily, had enough petrol only for twenty minutes over the battle area; Lightnings, one hour. For cover from German fighters, which would certainly swarm over us from the Naples, Montecorvina and Foggia airfields, we would depend on our Sicilian fighters and on a few small carriers launching Spitfires. Never before had we attempted to provide air cover at such distances.

At sundown on Wednesday, September 8, the convoy was idling north of Cap d'Orlando, Sicily. Suddenly the ships picked up speed, swerved left in a spectacular manœuvre, and raced in a direct line for Salerno Bay. Zero was nine hours beyond the night seas.

8

The Assault

VICE-ADMIRAL HENRY K. Hewitt, U.S.N., had a boyish twinkle in his eyes as he pushed his well-upholstered frame to the edge of a well-upholstered chair and said quickly, "I've just received a signal asking that one of my cruisers be detached to accompany a convoy into Taranto. What do you think it means?"

"I don't know, sir," I said. "What do *you* think it means?"

"Hmm," he harumphed. "Something's happening, no doubt . . . no doubt. Better keep your ear glued to the radio today. You may hear something exciting."

This conversation took place in the Admiral's cabin, Fifth Army headquarters ship, about four p.m. on Wednesday, September 8, the eve of our Salerno Bay landing.

I did not have to wait long. At six o'clock the ship's radio carried General Eisenhower's statement from Algiers that Italy had capitulated.

A wave of jubilation swept the ship. Some of us took it for granted this meant the end of the war in the Mediterranean. The rumour spread that our plans had changed; we would go directly into Naples harbour and occupy the port. Many of us—too many of us—decided our assault landing would develop into an orderly motor ride from Naples to Rome.

I went to the War Room to get a reaction. General Clark's G-3, a former West Point football star, promptly set me straight.

"The operation goes through as scheduled," he said. "The news is good, but for purposes of this operation, it may be bad. We might have counted on having Italian opposition on the beaches; now we'll probably have to fight Germans from the word go."

Around our ship hundreds of vessels carrying a full army and its impedimenta ripped through the water at full speed for Salerno Bay.

At nine o'clock that night General Clark summoned the three headquarters correspondents to his cabin. He smiled—grimly, I thought—as he said, "Well, gentlemen. You know the plan. What do you think of it?"

"It's a very daring one," we murmured.

"Yes," said the General. "We'll be looking down the throats of the enemy.

With a few breaks we'll pull it off, all right. It's going to be quite a fight, though."

Did he hope to achieve surprise by the daring of the plan? "Well," the General replied, "we can't expect to achieve strategical surprise. It's a flanking manœuvre the enemy must expect after the Eighth Army's frontal attack. And he must have figured out that we want Naples.

"But we do hope to achieve a degree of tactical surprise. You see, there are two beaches which are favourable for a landing in the Naples area. One is Salerno beach, the other is the Gaeta beach in the bay just above Naples. The enemy may know we are going to attack in the Naples area; he probably does not know which of the two beaches we will assault—and exactly when. Yes, there will be some tactical surprise but no strategical surprise."

"But," the General persisted, "I am interested in your reaction to the plan. Did it surprise you gentlemen of the press?"

"Well," one of us quipped, "you didn't achieve strategical surprise, but you certainly achieved tactical surprise. This is going to be a hotter party than we figured."

Less than an hour after the General spoke, the first shots were fired in the Salerno campaign. The convoy was ploughing through the Tyrhennian Sea, about sixty miles from Salerno Bay, when an alarm sounded throughout the ship and a bugle sounded "General Quarters." "The ship's company will man their stations," a rather gruesome voice spoke over the speaker system. "Gunners, man your guns."

The ship's anti-aircraft guns burst into action as I reached the open deck. An estimated forty German bombers were overhead. The light of a half moon was augmented by dozens of flares floating down over a wide area. In a moment the night sky was lacerated with red tracer from every ship in the convoy.

As the Admiral suspected, we had been spotted in the afternoon, stalked throughout the evening. And at ten p.m. the Luftwaffe struck.

We put up a deafening barrage. Our fire must have filled the sky with flying lead comparable with the London defences. But the enemy matched our action with daring. His bombers swooped low enough to be seen silhouetted against the flares. The placid sea heaved as heavy calibre bombs struck the water near our ship.

About a mile off our port side a flotilla of tank and motor transport landing craft moved in single file. On this flotilla the Luftwaffe concentrated its attack. For forty minutes the bombers weaved and thrummed over the small ships—then suddenly all was quiet. As the last flares hit the water and were snuffed out, the action's results were estimated. One small craft hit and burning; six bombers definitely destroyed, one probably destroyed.

The armada moved into and beyond the midnight. Aboard the headquarters ship, tension mounted to excruciating levels. We knew the enemy had been alert to our approach for at least six hours, perhaps much longer. The roads from Naples to Salerno beach were first-class highways; one highway ran parallel to the shoreline for the entire twenty-five miles. The Germans could line the beach with troops and guns on the shortest notice. Even our tactical surprise was now gravely in doubt.

Between one and one-thirty a.m. the minesweepers churned into Salerno Bay—slightly ahead of the armada. We knew a thick minefield had been laid in the Bay. Six miles out and about five hundred yards wide, the minefield ran practically the twenty-five-mile length of the Bay.

Within an hour the intrepid sweepers had cleared three narrow passages through the minefield, each about one thousand yards wide. Two of these opened through to the beaches north of the Sele River, area of the British assault; one led to the southern beach for the American landing.

Three miles seaward of the minefield, nine miles out, the armada awaited the signal to move inshore.

About two-thirty a.m. a series of flares bobbing on the calm waters of the Bay announced completion of the sweeping and traced the safety route to the shore. The assault landing craft moved carefully within the flarepath. Their decks were jammed with perspiring troops carrying full battle equipment. The night was stifling. There was hardly a ripple of breeze. The craft were scheduled to touch shore at 0330 hours.

The plan of assault was a modified form of surprise. There was to be no "Dieppe" pattern of surprise in which troops crept ashore hoping to catch the beach defences unawares. Nor was there to be prolonged artillery preparation from the sea. Something in between.

At 0315 hours, H minus 15, eight British and American destroyers, deploying three miles offshore, opened their guns in a mighty synchronized salvo concentrated on the narrow stretches of beach selected for the landing.

There was an almost immediate reply from the darkness of the beach. The answering guns were quickly identified as German eighty-eights. There were not many of them; six at most.

Exactly fifteen minutes after the naval bombardment started, our first landing craft crunched against the beach. The areas were perfectly selected. The beach gradient was ideally steep. Ramps of our landing craft were lowered on to dry sand. Our troops swarmed off without wetting a boot.

The reader will, I trust, forgive me if I leave him teetering on the edge of the last paragraph and interrupt this narrative chronicle long enough to insert a few paragraphs on the composition and tactics of our assault force. The interruption will help clarify in the mind of the reader the subsequent exciting

events.

Although the size and make-up of the Fifth Army which sailed into Salerno Bay in the early morning hours of September 9 was strong enough for every eventuality, the assault force which made the original landing, seized the bridgehead and held it stubbornly, consisted of two British divisions, one United States division, one combat team of Rangers, and one formation of Commandos.

It was considered that this comparatively small part of the Fifth would be more effective, in the initial stages, than the immense bulk of the Army. Such a landing force could be adequately supplied across the beaches. It would have room for manœuvre in the narrow bridgehead. It could feel out the strength and location of main enemy forces, thus affording General Clark freedom of movement *by sea* to hurl the bulk of his army where and when he chose.

Moreover, we simply lacked beaching facilities for landing and supplying more than three divisions in the early stages. General Clark preferred a compact, well-supplied force, easily manœuvreable, to a glutted beachhead of inadequately supplied troops.

Thus, during the critical days of the bridgehead battle, the bulk of the Fifth Army rode at anchor in Salerno Bay, helpless to intervene except in small groups. The three divisions ashore (plus formations of Commandos and Rangers) literally had to do—or die.

The bridgehead battlefield was divided into three distinct operational areas, widely separated, for the initial phase.

The first was a two-thousand-yard strip of beach south of the Sele River near the ancient Greco-Roman town of Paestum. This was farthest removed from Naples and considered therefore the easiest of the three landing tasks. The lone American Division landed on this beach.

The second was a three-thousand-yard strip north of the Sele, about halfway between the river and Salerno City. The town of Battipaglia lay about seven miles inland at the important junction point of the coastal and central highways. Here the heaviest opposition was expected and the two British divisions were assigned this task. The distance between the British and American beachheads was about ten miles.

The third operational area was Salerno city and the northern corner of the Bay where a mighty range of mountains sweeps down to a sliver of beach. From two places on this beach, Vietri and Maiori, two roads lead tortuously through mountain passes to Naples plain. Commandos landed at Vietri, took Salerno city, and raced up the main road through the mountains. Rangers leaped ashore at Maiori, six miles west of Vietri, and pushed up a secondary road to secure the remaining pass into the Naples plain.

All three operational areas were taken on D-day, according to plan. But the

heartbreak and herculean effort entailed were not according to plan, nor were the cunning and striking power of the enemy. The glory of the assault may be measured by the desperate moments—and they were many—when disaster came close enough to touch, but never conquer, our exhausted troops.

American troops, scurrying down landing ramps in white moonlight at 0330 zero, saw nothing ahead of them, not even barbed wire. Shells from our own destroyers were screaming overhead. Engineer companies gingerly began sweeping the beaches with mine detectors. Behind them troops were pulling ashore anti-tank guns. Huge "ducks" trundled out of the water like sea monsters. Nothing happened—for five minutes.

Suddenly the night air was filled with fire. The first American troops fell, uttering sharp cries. Others dug into the sand where they stood, or found uneasy cover behind shorebound craft or ducks.

The fire, machine-gun and rifle, was coming from pillboxes cleverly built into sand dunes rising about 150 yards from the waterline. A frantic reconnaissance showed that 88-millimeter fire was coming from Mark VI tanks fifty yards behind the pillboxes. Tracer sheered the air above the low-lying Yanks. An infantry landing craft was the first to be put out of action. But no enemy was visible.

Officers made a quick estimate of the situation. Casualties were light and scattered, all out of proportion to the firepower hurled by the enemy. Re-forming their ranks, the assault troops raced across one hundred yards or more of open beach. Some perished on land mines. The majority flung themselves into the sand at the foot of the dunes in uneasy security under the barrels of enemy guns still spitting wildly at the shoreline.

At close quarters the cheaply constructed pillboxes were easy to take out. Assault engineers, crawling on their stomachs through the confusing light and shadow of sand dunes under a half moon, used their grenades and bayonets. The first Germans surrendered.

Three miles out at sea, our destroyers moved in slowly, marking the fire of the eighty-eights, concentrating on the suspected areas. Within an hour the German tanks began to withdraw to the main highway nearly three miles back.

Under fire, the engineers cleared a two-hundred-yard-wide strip, removed the mines, marked the passageway with white tape. Hundreds more troops scrambled ashore, joined their comrades deploying on mine-free farmland about a mile inland. German tanks and troops were retreating slowly, fighting every inch of the way.

Once they had lost their beach defences, the Germans had no prepared positions until they reached the hills of Mount Soprano, six miles inland. The ground was flat, offered no substantial hedges or trees, and few buildings except ruins of Roman theatres nearly two thousand years old.

The Germans obviously had fallen victim to tactical surprise and political manipulation. We learned later that they took over the pitiful Italian beach defences on the night of September 7, the moment they suspected the coming capitulation. They brought modest quantities of tanks, guns and men into the beach area twenty-four hours before our landing, but they lacked time to improve the defences. Their strategy from the first was one of retreat to the hills. This they effected with customary skill.

Under covering fire of cruisers which had now joined destroyers well inshore, our troops moved through the town of Paestum, secured a strip of main coastal highway, and pushed the Germans into the hills of Mount Soprano.

At first light, shortly after six a.m., the first objective was fully in the hands of the Americans. Troops and material were landing on the beach under intermittent fire of eighty-eights emplaced high on the face of Mount Soprano.

North of the Sele River, the two British divisions touched shore at exactly 0330 zero. Here, too, the landing party was covered by fifteen minutes of destroyer fire. Strangely enough, this was hardly necessary. There were no tanks, no pillboxes on the beach. Two clusters of eighty-eights, emplaced about one thousand yards back of the beach, holed two landing craft and inflicted negligible casualties on troops. British engineers found, however, that mines were laid in lavish quantity everywhere along the beaches and fields beyond.

British advance parties poured through holes in the minefields and made straight for Battipaglia. Here they encountered their first real opposition. A company of the 16th Panzer Grenadiers offered fight. After a sharp encounter they were driven out of the town.

At six a.m. the British sat on the crossroads of Battipaglia, having completed their initial mission in less than scheduled time.

Commandos, landing at Vietri at 0330 zero, detoured long enough to occupy Salerno city after sharp street-fighting with a handful of Germans. Then they pushed up the main Naples road through the mountains, secured about half the length of the pass, were held up by German demolitions and cleverly emplaced artillery. They were commanded by a British brigadier who volunteered to act under the American colonel directing all Commando-Ranger operations.

The Rangers, landing simultaneously at Maiori, moved up a secondary road through the mountains until they, too, were held up by demolitions and artillery.

Neither Commandos nor Rangers attained their full objectives, which were to secure the passes to a point commanding the Naples plain. Both parties had progressed four to five miles along the route when they were stopped at first

light.

Thus objectives all along the bridgehead were substantially attained within four hours after the initial assault.

Aboard the headquarters ship General Clark received the news with tempered satisfaction. He knew that the battle of the bridgehead, far from being over, had scarcely begun.

On the morning of Thursday, September 9, the German command occupying the post office building in Naples was presented with a report on the dawn assault of the British-American Fifth Army. It outlined in brief the following situation:

South of the Sele River, the Americans held a bridgehead about four miles wide and six miles deep including the town of Paestum and a section of the coastal highway. North of the Sele, the British held a bridgehead six miles wide and seven miles deep including the town of Battipaglia, vital junction controlling all roads into the bridgehead area from the north and east. Salerno city was more or less no-man's land. Rangers and Commandos in the mountains had the most tenuous lines of supply to ships in the Bay. Salerno harbour was neutralized by German artillery in the hills north of the city. Salerno Bay was crammed with Allied shipping, protected by an umbrella of between forty and fifty fighter planes.

There was no contact, except by sea, between the three Allied beachheads. The Germans still controlled the beach around the mouth of the Sele River, splitting the main American and British forces.

The 16th Panzer Grenadiers, elements of which had unsuccessfully opposed the landings, occupied the length of the Sele River and were concentrated in the basin between the Sele and Galore rivers, ten miles inland. The 16th Panzer Division had arrived in the Eboli-Contursi area, twelve miles inland. The 29th Motorized Division was in the area between Naples and Avellino, available for counter-action.

Other intelligence obviously known to the Germans: The Allied fighter umbrella was operating from Sicily, two hundred airline miles distant. Allied beach engineers were working frantically to develop a supply line from the ships to the divisions ashore. The supply problem did not allow of any more divisions to be landed.

The German command (as we discovered later) adopted the following plan of action:

The 15th and 16th Panzer Divisions will keep constant pressure on the British-American force by frequent sharp counter-attacks. The Sele River line of demarcation will be held by German troops as long as possible. Battipaglia must be regained at all costs. A strong sustained counter-attack will be mounted as quickly as possible with the object of driving the Allies into the

sea. Immediate and heavy air bombardment of ships in Salerno Bay will be undertaken immediately. The beach areas must be made untenable for the unloading of supplies.

The German Command felt that if they could keep Allied troops ashore fighting until exhaustion, meanwhile so disorganizing beach supply lines as to prevent the landing of reinforcements, a strong counter-attack at the psychological moment must succeed. They had the interior lines by road and rail. They had the men and supplies. They had the near-by airfields. Above all, they could assume the initiative at any time.

That was the German plan. On paper it looked good. And it almost succeeded.

On the morning of the 9th I saw the German plan begin to operate with savage intensity.

Fighter-bombers of the Luftwaffe, defiant of the Spitfires, Lightnings and Seafires patrolling above the Bay, hurtled down with reckless daring on the anchored armada. Aboard the headquarters ship we experienced six air attacks in the first two hours of daylight. Two bombs dropped within seventy-five yards of our intricately rigged ship, nerve centre of the entire operation.

The attacks were short but they were skilfully executed and uncannily accurate. The German bombers swept in from the sea, darted through holes in our (as yet) leaky umbrella, and dropped their heavy bombs on big units anchored in the Bay. They continued on toward the beach, losing altitude and gaining speed, and dropped fragmentation bombs on beach engineers unloading supplies across the ramps of landing craft. Then they swept inland, strafing troops until they disappeared over the mountain peaks.

When I went ashore early that morning with one of the General's liaison officers to gather a first-hand report, the German plan was developing with disturbing effect.

The first aid post on the American section of the beach, under fire itself, was frantically handling a stream of casualties. The beach was pocked with slit trenches and bomb holes. Newly landed troops were markedly uneasy. A battery of eighty-eights on the face of Mount Soprano was lobbing shells into the area. One of our destroyers was steaming slowly one hundred yards offshore, firing steadily into the face of the mountain.

Three miles inland, practically at the foot of Mount Soprano, we found the American divisional command post (headquarters). The atmosphere here was one of uneasy satisfaction. The troops were tired but holding steadily against sharp counter-attacks. In a field not three hundred yards from the command post, four IV tanks were smoking, knocked out by fire of an American cruiser less than an hour before. Troops were quick to admit that the cruiser's accuracy dissolved a nasty situation. We were fanning out around Mount

Soprano, and north of our beachhead in an attempt to make contact with the British divisions across the Sele.

In the British beachhead, reached by motor launch, the situation was even less favourable. The single company occupying Battipaglia had fallen victim to a strong German counter-attack. We had lost the road junction. A British brigade was preparing a drive to retake the town. But the whole British beachhead was being harried by confusing German counter-attacks consisting of six or ten tanks followed by one or two companies of infantry.

North of Salerno city, Rangers and Commandos clung to their mountain pass positions. German troops had cut in behind them, destroyed their beach supplies, isolated them with forty-eight hours of rations and ammunition. But wireless reports from their portable transmitting set carried a defiant note.

"We are sitting pretty, taking pot shots at the Germans on the next hill," was one of the messages from the legendary American colonel in charge of Ranger-Commando operations, the Wild Bill Donovan of this war.

"They're great fellows," murmured the General that day. "They'll go anywhere, do anything. They'll hold the position, all right."

By the time I arrived back at the headquarters ship, late in the afternoon of the 9th, the German air plan was in full blast. Ten more attacks had been made on the ship and the transports clustered in the vicinity; bombs were dropped with improved accuracy.

The principal heroes of the piece thus far were the beach engineers. Impressed with the urgency of getting supplies ashore quickly, they declined to take shelter during raids. Some of them fell as they hauled ammunition across the ramps of landing craft.

The first American military cemetery on the Italian mainland was being dug in a lush green field about three miles inland.

In the war room, staff officers worked with frantic speed, hardly conscious of the tremors of the ship and the deafening bark of anti-aircraft guns now in operation the greater proportion of every hour.

The Nazi counter-attack was gathering immense strength. In the ward room correspondents Quentin Reynolds, Reynolds Packard and myself examined a huge map of Italy.

The Eighth Army had just captured Vibo Valentia, 175 road miles from Salerno. No help could be expected for a long time. The three divisions ashore would have to fight through to their own salvation.

Above: “To the soldier the battle is paramount.” A machine-gun unit covers a patrol moving into the valley of the Simeto in Sicily.

Above: On the highway between Agira and Adrano, the author jots down a story from the lips of Sergeant R. McPhee, a Canadian engineer, after the latter's return from an exploit which won him the Military Medal.

9

Drama Under a Hazy Moon

"HELL," SAID QUENTIN REYNOLDS, "this is worse than Dieppe. Much worse."

I had just clambered aboard the headquarters ship after a nerve-wracking day at the fluid front lines of our Salerno bridgehead. It was late afternoon on September 9, about fifteen hours after the Fifth Army's landing operation began. I was glad to board a launch at the beach; looked forward to spending the night aboard ship. I found Reynolds pacing the deck. His jowlish face had lost its customary wrinkles of quiet amusement. He was grim.

"Dieppe was bad," he murmured, "but this—" and his eyes danced skyward.

Reynolds was comparing these air attacks with those he experienced aboard the headquarters destroyer of Canada's Major-General Hamilton Roberts off Dieppe in August, 1942. There was no comparison on land. When I left the beach an hour before, our troops were carefully extending their bridgehead, at the same time fighting off small but sharp German counter-attacks shrewdly calculated to confuse and exhaust us.

The enemy was still conserving his land forces, pulling them back as though on a spring—for eventual delivery of the big punch. But his air force had already begun its preparatory task.

The ferocity of German air attacks on our armada in Salerno Bay during D-day and on the Friday and Saturday can best be illustrated by the ordeal of General Clark's headquarters ship, the *U.S.S. Ancon*. Except for daylight trips by launch to visit front lines ashore, I was aboard the *Ancon* throughout the three flaming days and more desperate nights.

These three days and nights traced the crescendo of the Luftwaffe's attempt to make the Bay untenable for further landing operations, first step in the German grand plan for wiping out the Salerno bridgehead.

During her first thirty-six hours in the Bay, the *Ancon*, riding at anchor in the midst of a dazzling array of warships, troopships and freighters, had thirty general quarters (action stations). Of these, twenty-two were the real thing—bombs dropped close by; the remaining eight were high-level threats which never developed into attacks.

Our fighter cover was functioning well—better than we had any right to expect. But then, we hadn't expected much. The two-hundred-mile air link between our fighter bases in Sicily and Salerno Bay was tenuous. Relays had to be sent out on a split-minute schedule in order to maintain constant patrol over the area. The least climatic disturbance, the slightest overcast or wind, the smallest lapse in organizational efficiency—any of these cause a temporary disconnection in the taut air link between Salerno and Sicily.

By day Spitfires and Lightnings, supported by a squadron of Seafires from a few auxiliary carriers, maintained a surveillance which was superb in view of the difficulties. By night, fewer Beaufighters ranged the skies. But day or night, the Luftwaffe tore in with a daring and determination which would have fouled the most solid umbrella.

That the Salerno armada was not destroyed is a singular achievement of the British-American air forces. That it was not even seriously damaged is in the nature of a miracle.

All during Thursday night the *Ancon's* guns were blazing. Early in the evening a motor launch near-by, filled with petrol tins, was hit. It burned brightly until almost midnight, making an ideal beacon for relays of German bombers. To this Nature had added a moon approaching the full and the Luftwaffe a lavish display of parachute flares.

Supper was delayed two hours because mess orderlies were too busy passing ammunition. We ate quickly during a lull in the attack. Our appetites were not particularly sharp. Just before mess call, six bombs had dropped within a seventy-five-yard radius around the ship. Almost as terrifying was the roar of our anti-aircraft guns; their recoil sent tremors through the ship.

Out on deck the rain of splinters from our own and near-by ack-ack guns made fresh air a rather risky luxury. Inside, the heat was stifling. All safety doors were secured; the ventilation system was cut off because the intake of what should have been fresh air sucked the smoke of battle into the ship.

We perspired and waited. Sometimes we went on deck, flattening ourselves against the nearest wall. The sky made a grotesque panorama of fire, flares and tracer. Etched against this eerie light I could make out the figures of the crew passing ammunition along a human chain.

Then inside again, we paced up and down the ward room. Lieut.-Colonel Vincent Sheean muttered as he passed me, "I don't like this. I don't like it one bit." Sometimes a near miss shook the ship with such fury we thought we were hit. A bridge officer came in for a swallow of coffee just as a tremendous crash sent a vicious tremor through the ship. I asked him if we'd been hit.

"Don't worry, buddy," he said. "When we're hit, you won't have to ask."

Luftwaffe attacks on shipping and the beach area gained greater intensity during Friday afternoon and night. The enemy was losing substantial numbers

of planes—five to eight on every attack involving thirty or more planes—but the manner in which their pilots came diving through our fighter screen drew praise even from their intended victims.

On Saturday a climax was reached in the Luftwaffe's attempt to carry through its assigned task in the German grand plan. From first light enemy bombers broke through every hour, as though they were punching a time-clock in the clouds.

Shortly after nine a.m., when ack-ack guns were barking all over our section of the Bay, a crash was heard which by its immensity invested all other noise with a muffled quality.

"She's been hit!" shouted a sailor, pointing.

About 150 yards off our bow I saw the American cruiser *Savannah* take a sudden list to starboard. Figures darted quickly about her forward deck. I trained my field glasses on her. The crumpled barrel of a heavy gun lay close to a blackened smoking hole in the deck.

A British monitor steamed close to the stricken warship as though to support her. The latter's list was now more pronounced and her bow was down. But she was moving under her own power. Together the two ships steamed across our bow, slowly, ever so slowly. All eyes were trained on them. Suddenly a billow of greenish yellow smoke belched from the deck of the wounded ship. A magazine had exploded. But the gallant vessel kept moving, the monitor by her side.

Two hours later, her list under control, she disappeared over the horizon in tow of a salvage ship. She was the first Salerno victim of a new German weapon—the radio-controlled aerial bomb.

Admiral Hewitt decided to move the *Ancon* from Salerno area. At dusk the ship heaved anchor and, escorted by two destroyers, sailed sixty miles out to sea. Strict radio silence was ordered. Under a full moon the ship moved out of the battle area. Most of us turned in for the first good sleep in four nights.

At three-thirty a.m. the alarm bells clanged. General quarters: A wave of uneasiness swept the ship. For the first time since the expedition started we were without the ack-ack protection of big naval units. Our location was a secret even from our own fighter cover.

Up on deck all was ominously quiet. Gunners were at their posts, the human ammunition chain was in position; but there was no order to fire. A slight sea haze diffused the bright moonlight. We could hear, faintly, the drone of planes.

Down in the war room a tense conference was being held. The ship's detecting apparatus had a grim story to reveal: bombers on our port side, others on our starboard, searching the seas for the *Ancon*.

Should we break radio silence to ask for air help? Or should we sit tight

and quiet? Admiral Hewitt was awakened. He ordered continued radio silence.

For an hour the crews stood by their guns. We moved nervously about the deck, pondering the Admiral's grand gamble. The drone of plane motors grew louder, then receded; revived, and finally our anxious ears heard no more. The sea haze had saved us from certain destruction.

In the morning we were back in Salerno Bay. The armada was intact. The bridgehead's first landing field was in operation. Our fighters were thick over the area. The Luftwaffe had failed.

On Sunday morning, September 12, General Clark and his Fifth Army Headquarters left the *U.S.S. Ancon* to establish themselves ashore. A Royal Navy landing ship (infantry) was lashed to the side of the *Ancon* to take off hundreds of officers and enlisted men in addition to a prodigious amount of office, signals and camp equipment.

The morning had been quiet, the Luftwaffe having passed the peak of its unsuccessful blitz on Salerno Bay. Reconnaissance reports showing that the beach was working smoothly and the armada hardly damaged must have been most discouraging to the Germans after their desperate and gallant attempts of the previous three days. Never again did the Luftwaffe seriously endanger our Salerno operations.

Just as our landing craft pulled away from the *Ancon*, a burst of ack-ack fire greeted another Luftwaffe attack. We modestly accepted it as a two-hundred-gun salute to mark our departure.

Our bridgehead had now been extended to include the area around Salerno city, the plain as far inland as Battipaglia (but not including the town itself), the entire stretch of beach and the southern anchor town of Agropoli.

General Clark established Fifth Army headquarters at dead centre of the bridgehead, straddling the line of demarcation between his army's British and American formations. We occupied the wooded grounds of an estate at the junction of the Sele River and the coastal highway, about three miles inland.

Spirits were high around the camp on that Sunday, fourth day of the assault. The decision of General Clark to establish himself ashore was taken by most to indicate that the bridgehead battle was over—and won.

Clark knew better. The reason for going ashore was far less comforting than that glibly discussed as we sat around our forested bivouac area. Only to his personal staff did the General confide his concern for the next seventy-two hours. The Germans were concentrating tremendous strength in the Eboli-Contursi sector; their counter-attack was inevitable. If it were delayed three or four days, we would have the strength ashore to meet it. If it came promptly, the situation would be difficult—most difficult.

The General had come ashore to be close in touch with his troops if and when the crisis developed. He recognized that in this, as in every amphibious

operation of a daring nature, it was all or nothing. And the gamble had to be shared by the Fifth Army Staff.

For people at home, marking their living-room maps with coloured pins on that Sunday morning, the situation of the Fifth Army must have appeared quite reassuring. But maps do not clearly indicate the gathering dynamite of a counter-stroke, nor have they the means of showing the ghastly exhaustion of troops who have fought, advanced, been held on the qui-vive for eighty hours, with only intermittent naps to break the mental and physical tension.

True, we had gained our bridgehead almost—but not quite—according to plan.

On Friday, September 10, the Americans south of the Sele River widened their bridgehead south and east, cleared the eighty-eights from the face of Mount Soprano, and moved north along the coastal highway toward a junction with the British. Albanella and Altavilla, eight and nine miles inland, remained in German hands as threats to our further advance inland. From these points the Germans were thrusting frequently, using a troop of tanks and a company of infantry, by way of denying our men respite. In this tactic the enemy was supported by almost hourly strafing raids pushed through our fighter cover at some cost.

On the same day, Friday, a British brigade launched an attack to regain the vital town of Battipaglia. It succeeded after bitter fighting. But the Germans reacted viciously. Battipaglia, as we learned later, was essential to their developing plan for wiping out the whole Allied bridgehead. All day they counter-attacked in strength against the flanks of the narrow British beachhead north of the Sele. Our troops were forced to give ground. And at nightfall, in a smashing attack, the Germans regained Battipaglia once more.

In the northern corner of the Bay, Rangers and Commandos clung tenaciously to their positions astride the two mountain passes leading to Naples plain. German artillery fire was heavy but they held with magnificent spirit, and late Friday a trickle of supplies went forward to them through Maiori.

On Saturday the main American and British beachheads were connected. Aided by intense and accurate gunfire from naval vessels, wings of the British and American formations moved simultaneously toward the mouth of the Sele, forcing the last German beach patrols to retreat across the highway well back to the Battipaglia-Eboli sector. At the same time British formations moved north to occupy Salerno city, which had been, until then, a no-man's land; and American units darted down to invest Agropoli at the southern corner of the Bay.

These moves improved our situation insofar as they established land communication between all three sectors of our operations (though we were forced to use secondary roads close to the beach as long as the Germans

controlled the main highway at Battipaglia). They also enabled us to construct two crude landing strips on farmland north and south of the Sele. These strips were ready Saturday afternoon to receive a limited number of fighters and, with difficulty, transport planes bringing in urgent supplies.

Thus, when General Clark established his headquarters ashore on Sunday morning, we were holding a dangerously narrow bridgehead stretching twenty-five miles along the beach from Salerno to Agropoli.

But the Germans still held Battipaglia and our reconnaissance brought back disturbing reports of immense enemy concentrations clogging the roads and overflowing into the fields between Battipaglia and Eboli.

"Our troops are tired, let's admit it," a dust-covered staff officer said Sunday afternoon after a tour of the front lines.

"But they're holding," he added. "They're holding well, even if those goddamned eighty-eights are playing hell with 'em."

The German plan for smashing our bridgehead was now developing a pattern recognizable on our side of the line. Small panzer units were thrusting everywhere along the front—thrusting and withdrawing, never giving us a chance to consolidate a line behind which we could rest a portion of our weary and perspiring troops. North of the Sele, before Battipaglia, the British were taking the brunt of the punishment. American formations, themselves near exhaustion, were moved across the Sele to support the British.

The Germans continued their devilish thrusts. And behind these thrusts their main counter-attack was in the making.

General Clark made two moves to meet the threat. He ordered an American infantry division to come ashore across already overloaded beaches and along our limited and clogged roads; and he requested British-American naval units —our only effective heavy artillery—to come as far inshore as possible and blast the German concentration area with everything they had.

When darkness fell over the bridgehead that Sunday night, the sultry air was filled with the muffled screams of heavy calibre naval shells hurtling overhead toward the German concentration area six to eight miles beyond.

The crisis of Salerno was fast approaching. We all knew it now. There was little sleep at headquarters that night.

10
The Crisis

SEPTEMBER 13. MONDAY. First light broke over an unbelievably blue sky and in an atmosphere so quiet that the crowing of a cock cut the ears. Yet we were in the very centre of the Salerno bridgehead on the fifth day of the battle, the desperately critical day never to be forgotten by those who lived it.

The day began reasonably well. An overnight success was reported. American troops, thrusting out from the southern flank of our bridgehead, captured Albanella, a small town nine miles inland. This removed one of three German salients thrusting dagger-like into the body of the bridgehead. The others were Altavilla and the key-point of Battipaglia.

There was more good news. Our air superiority had attained a level approaching domination. The climbing sun glinted on the wings of Spitfires, Lightnings and Mustangs circling overhead in endless procession. Without serious interference from the Luftwaffe, naval and engineer beach parties were beginning to bring ashore advance units of the new American infantry division ordered into action by General Clark.

German counter-attacks against the British in the Battipaglia area slackened off during the morning. Enemy troops were ominously inactive. We dared to hope the night's naval bombardment had disorganized their formations.

Our troops, both British and American—still the original assault formations—were now limb-weary and nerve-frayed. The questions they asked were: "How far is the Eighth Army from us?" and "When are the other divisions coming ashore?" Replies to both were discouraging. The Eighth Army, despite its prodigious strides, was still seventy-five miles to the south. On the beach, advance elements of the fresh American division were still sorting themselves out, while a British armoured division scheduled to land had not yet approached the shore.

British formations north of the Sele River were even more exhausted than the Americans, having withstood stiffer counter-attacks during the previous three days and suffered heavier losses in dead and wounded. General Clark, seeking to strengthen the British flank, moved the left wing of the Americans

to the line of the Sele where it connected somewhat loosely with the right wing of the British.

Aerial reconnaissance during the afternoon continued to bring in reports of intense German activity behind Battipaglia. The road between Battipaglia and Eboli was thick with German traffic. Obviously the main counter-attack was being mounted.

The German plan thus far had worked with fifty per cent. efficiency. The Luftwaffe had failed in its task to smash the Salerno armada and to make the beaches untenable for further landing operations. But the 15th and 16th Panzer Grenadiers had been markedly successful in harassing our troops with cunningly executed counter-attacks, preventing us from consolidating a line and buffeting our troops into a physical and mental exhaustion which is the penultimate stage of disaster.

At three p.m. this correspondent was summoned to the operations tent. A senior staff officer smiled grimly as he showed me the ops map. Heavily marked was the German concentration area, shaped like a sledgehammer, its handle running along the Battipaglia-Eboli highway and its blunt head shading the area between the Sele and Galore rivers.

"We know the counter-attack is coming. We don't know when," said the officer. "If it comes Wednesday or after, we'll stop it cold. If it comes today or tomorrow—well, anything can happen."

Four hours later, as a blood-red sun was dropping into a slot behind the sea, the German sledgehammer struck.

The climactic stage had been launched in the German plan to smash our bridgehead.

Dusk was the time chosen by the German command; in the rapidly failing light and on a fluid front our superior air power could not exert its strength in close support.

From their forested bivouacs just south of Eboli, troops of the 15th Panzers moved forward on a three-mile front, enclosing their advance within the lines of the Sele and Calore as these rivers converge to a junction, four miles from the beach, and flow in a single swift-running stream to the sea. The Germans chose to attack down the line of demarcation between the British and American formations, the object being to reach the beach and split the Fifth Army.

Under covering fire of an estimated sixty tanks being used as mobile artillery, German infantry pressed forward between the rivers. Seven miles from the beach, they struck at the left wing of the Americans. It was a resounding blow for which our exhausted troops were ill-prepared. In the uncertain light between dusk and moonrise, fierce hand-to-hand fighting raged on level farmland.

From their positions below Battipaglia, the right wing of a British formation swept forward to support their American comrades. Close-in fighting reached a desperate, bloody stage—when at a magnificently chosen psychological moment, the full weight of German tanks was hurled down the centre of the battlefield.

The Allied line wavered—and at the crucial point between the rivers, German tanks tore through the gap, hell-bent for the junction of the rivers.

Just south of this battlefield, the Germans launched a companion attack from Altavilla, pounced on the Americans holding Albanella, drove them south and west of the town.

The stage was now set to split the Allied bridgehead, engage the two sectors in detail, and drive them into the sea.

At nine p.m. a whistle blew in the bivouac area of Fifth Army headquarters, twenty-five hundred yards from the junction of the rivers. All officers were asked to gather in the centre area.

A greying colonel addressed them in a level, lifeless voice. "German tanks have broken through our lines," he said. "They are coming down the Sele toward this camp. All officers will take a roll-call of their men. All troops who have guns—and that means everybody—will be alert for further instructions. That's all."

Cooks, clerks, orderlies; senior officers long accustomed to desk jobs—all examined their rifles, fitted cartridge clips into place. The sounds of battle, heard by us intermittently all day, now seemed louder and more intense. Perhaps my imagination was being overworked. Along the main highway, running close to our camp, trucks and armoured vehicles were screeching south toward Paestum and the landing beaches. Was a retreat in progress? This, too, I thought, might be imagination.

Suddenly all sound ceased to exist. Gunfire, traffic, everything seemed to have melted away. A full moon streaming down on our forested area created bizarre patterns of light and shade on the ground.

At ten p.m. a whistle summoned another conference, this time only for officers heading sections of the camp. German tanks were reported to have reached the junction of the rivers, twenty-five hundred yards from the camp. Officers would form patrols with men available to them; they would fan out along the south bank of the Sele flowing 150 yards north of the camp. Signal that the enemy was coming through would be three pistol shots fired in the centre of the camp.

The patrols crept away, heads low, toward the river.

Minutes ticked by with excruciating leisure. It was hot; perspiration dropped from my nose and chin. I thought of three broadcasts I had made on B.B.C. before leaving England; they were in the form of open letters to

Goebbels, Goering and Himmler; well monitored in Berlin. An uncanny silence added its torture. Now and again a whispered challenge and password came in with the breeze. (I noted, without humour, that the challenge on this night was "Canadian," the password "wheat.") Later, a heavy hammering from the direction of the river shattered the silence. Our troops were mining the pontoon bridge.

Instinct kept pounding words of panic into my mind. Why not run? Anywhere. Just run. Why wait here for the Germans to come and collect you? Run. Run. Perhaps down to the beach, three miles across open fields. Perhaps down to the highway to Paestum. But run.

Reason argued differently. This thing had to be resolved in an orderly fashion. Panic would be disastrous. There were experienced officers here, making plans, holding the camp quiet and disciplined. They would know what to do. It was best to sit quiet. Minutes ticked by and perspiration dripped. I kept thinking, What were the Germans doing? Why didn't their tanks come tearing down to us?

Over a hedge I heard a soldier singing in a carefree, off-key voice: "I'm a Yankee Doodle dandy, Yankee Doodle do or die . . ." That made me feel better. *Someone* was cheerful.

We sat on a log—Reynolds Packard of United Press, Herbert Matthews of *The New York Times*, and myself—and our conversation was light and mostly empty. Sammy Schulman of International News Photos, pale, his cameras hanging lavishly from his shoulders, produced a bottle of whiskey he had been hoarding since we left Africa.

"That's the nice thing about a crisis," said Packard. "It invariably produces a bottle of whiskey."

Captain John Boettiger, President Roosevelt's son-in-law, strolled over to our group of correspondents and officers. "I've got an extra revolver here," he said. "No use wasting it. Who wants it?" One of our group took it.

The uncanny quiet persisted. An officer in the group said, "If any of you gets out of this—and I don't—would you tell my wife I was thinking about her? She knows how I feel about her."

At midnight a lieutenant-colonel came out of the operations room.

"The highway south is clear. They haven't cut it. We're going to move camp to a new area a few miles down the road. There'll be trucks enough for everybody—twelve men to a truck."

The truck in which I rode held twelve men, British and American, officers and other ranks. As it raced down the highway at high speed, we crouched low, not knowing whether German tank guns were covering the road.

Four miles down, we turned into a farm road, bumped through a heavily wooded area. Here we stopped. I trudged to the nearest tree, curled up, and fell

asleep almost immediately. I was desperately weary.

What happened on Salerno plain during the night of September 13-14 will not be clearly understood until a frank recounting of events by the German commander in the area is made available to us. I can write with accuracy that the bridgehead was saved by the *collusion* of Allied courage, great good fortune, and cool unflinching action by General Mark Clark in the face of disaster. But this does not fully explain the miracle of the Fifth Army's salvation on that fabulous night.

We know what the Germans did that night; how their tanks broke through the centre of our line, inflicting heavy casualties, and disorganizing some British and larger American formations. But we do not know what process of military reasoning dictated to the Germans their hesitation—their fatal hesitation—when a decisive victory was within grasp of their panzers.

Their tanks smashed down the middle of our bridgehead to within four miles of the sea. Between them and a clean split of our forces there was nothing their tank tracks could not crush. Yet they hesitated—foolishly, inexplicably—and their opportunity was forever gone. The dawn, like Cinderella's midnight, was their undoing.

Military historians will one day, I am sure, render the judgment that the Allied navies and air forces preserved the Salerno bridgehead. With this judgment no Fifth Army man will disagree. But while navies and air forces can preserve a bridgehead they cannot recreate one which has been lost.

The Fifth Army held its bridgehead on the night of September 13-14; by the skin of its teeth, through the unexpected gift of the enemy's failure to perceive and exploit his clean break-through, by the refusal of our command and troops to concede defeat. The Fifth Army held itself together, loosely but in being, on the bridgehead through the night. And because it was still there at the dawn, the navies and air forces could apply their strength, gallantly, magnificently, to save the position.

When morning revealed to the Germans their immense tactical advantage, they still might have wiped out our assault force, all other things being equal. But all other things were not equal. We had immense naval and air strength to throw into the fight. In short, during the night the Fifth Army saved the bridgehead. During the morning the navies and air forces saved the Fifth Army.

Reconstruction of events in the field during the night of 13-14, even on our side, is difficult. Communication between our formations was at best haphazard; organization in many cases broke under the German hammer blows. Headquarters, it seemed to me, had only a blurred picture of the location and fate of our dispositions. Corrective action had an inordinate content of guesswork and gamble.

When German tanks broke down the centre of the battlefield between the Sele and Galore, our troops, British and American, were swept aside like furrows from a plow. Losses in missing were extremely high. German strong points at Battipaglia and Altavilla, on either flank of the break-through area, were rounding up sections of our retreating forces.

A great hole had been torn in our lines. Through it, enemy tanks rumbled almost unopposed until their spearhead reached the confluence of the rivers. This was between nine and ten p.m. Here an armoured reconnaissance company (American), sent forward to assess the situation, offered resistance. It was not much but it was noisy. A spunky American captain commanding the company (I could not ascertain his name in the excitement of the next day) refused to be flustered by the considerable number of vehicles retreating along the roads. He deployed his ridiculously small force, set up posts for enfilading fire across exits from the bottleneck of the rivers.

The German spearhead hesitated—and halted. Its commander was confused and apparently concerned about the weight of forces opposing him across the dark fields. Behind him, the bulk of the 15th Panzers and perhaps the 16th waited to exploit the break-through.

But the spearhead halted. We may never know why. It was four miles from its goal—the beach. Practically nothing lay in front of it. Only the reconnaissance company and Fifth Army headquarters with its cooks, clerks and orderlies manning rifles.

The German commander didn't know this. He stopped a few hours—and never moved forward thereafter.

Meanwhile General Clark, his tent virtually under enemy guns, was working coolly, concisely, on measures to rally his defence. Liaison officers from navy and air force were close by. Terse instructions went out by wireless and runner. All available British and American forces would be rallied to prevent further break-through on the flanks of the bridgehead. The enemy must be enclosed within his present lines, thus offering a good target for naval and air bombardment when daylight came. The breakthrough in the centre must be sealed off.

Shortly after midnight, six American tank destroyers (heavy calibre guns mounted on Sherman tank chassis) roared up the highway, took a position against the German spearhead. These were followed by two regimental combat teams of the newly landed American division who worked through the remaining dark hours to construct a new defence-line where Army headquarters had been bivouacked a few hours before. Other reinforcements scrambled on to the beaches, were rushed into the new line.

At dawn this patchwork defence-line was complete.

On this morning (the 14th) I was awakened by the roar of planes overhead.

I had no accurate idea where I was. My last recollection was the nerve-wracking midnight evacuation of the old headquarters area, and my complete exhaustion as I curled up under the first tree I saw after our truck had stopped.

It was quite light but the sun had not yet appeared over the hills to the east. Overhead, Allied planes were flying low, squadron after squadron, almost propeller to tail. More important to me at the time, two soldiers were brewing coffee some thirty yards away. A mugful of it was champagne to the taste, steel for the nerves.

"Who's tent is that?" I asked, pointing to a massive display of canvas near which I had slept.

"That's the general's," was the reply. "Major-General House of 12th Air Support Command."

I had met General Edwin J. House aboard the headquarters ship. He was up when I poked my head through a flap in his tent.

"You had a pretty rough time last night," he commented. He was clean-shaven, looked fresh; indeed, in high spirits.

"It's all right now," he said. "Nothing to be concerned about. The Germans are going to see something today they've never seen before. They're seeing it now, I expect"—and he glanced overhead at a sky roaring with planes —"We've laid on the biggest air show I've ever heard about. We're going to blast 'em so hard today they'll never know what hit 'em. We're tossing everything at them except the kitchen sink—and maybe we'll drop that, too."

He strolled away, whistling.

That morning I drove back to the headquarters we had evacuated on the midnight. The area was completely transformed. Heavy guns were emplaced. Ammunition was piled high. Fresh troops peered over the top of slit trenches. Artillery fire was being exchanged in desultory fashion. The noise of this was almost drowned out by the deep-throated roar of naval guns and the roar of our squadrons passing overhead.

The navy and air forces assumed a dominant role. They had begun the job of preserving the bridgehead.

On the morning of September 14 the German commander in the Naples area despatched to Hitler's headquarters a report which, probably liberally interpreted, was chortled over the Berlin radio.

The British-American army (reported Berlin) was evacuating the Salerno bridgehead. Their attacks from the beach having failed against stolid German resistance, the Anglo-Americans fell victim to carefully planned German counter-attacks. After suffering very heavy losses, the Fifth Army began an evacuation attempt by sea. Such was the German assessment of the situation.

Subsequent events attest that the enemy's claim was somewhat premature. But his confidence was founded on something more solid than braggadocio.

Although his air force had failed to cripple the Allied armada, and his tank spearhead the previous night squeamishly halted four miles short of a complete split of the Allied land force, he held the initiative along every mile of the narrow and tenuous bridgehead. And he was in excellent tactical position to exploit this initiative.

In the mountains north of Salerno his paratroops (acting as infantry) were infiltrating dangerously into Ranger and Commando positions. The city of Salerno was under German shellfire and the beach was neutralized. Down the length of the bridgehead—at Battipaglia, Eboli, Altavilla and Albanella—he had strong concentration points from which he could hurl his 15th and 16th Panzers. East and north of these points he had in reserve the 29th Motorized and the Herman Goering divisions. Most promising of all, he had his salient deeply thrust and strongly held down the centre of the bridgehead to within four miles of the beach.

Allied troops facing him were exhausted, in a brittle state of organization, ripe for retreat.

The enemy's position on that morning was good—but not as good as Berlin radio chortled. General Clark had issued no order to evacuate. No move toward evacuation was made by any formation. The only whisper of evacuation was contained in a precautionary reminder to officers in charge of certain base installations warning them that the possibility of evacuation could not be ruled out.

As a matter of fact, General Clark, far from evacuating forces, was landing troops as fast as the beaches could handle them.

The Germans did not renew their attack at first light. Perhaps their rear positions were more badly mauled by our naval fire than we suspected. Perhaps they were disconcerted by an American parachute formation which jumped during the night in the Avellino area, twenty miles north—a death or glory job if there ever was one. This jump, which one day will be an epic of devotion and courage known to every American schoolchild, was planned well in advance of the Salerno assault; it was not an emergency measure.

But the most likely explanation of the Germans' failure to press boldly their advantage is one of faulty intelligence. Their field commanders were distinctly diffident; at the climactic stage of their grand counter-attack they hesitated, wavered, moved gingerly, as though suspicious they might be trapped by a huge, fresh Allied force. They acted as though they didn't quite believe the glowing reports they themselves were sending back to Naples. Apparently their reconnaissance and intelligence co-operated poorly; this combined with sluggish field leadership cost them possible, even probable, victory.

Had they known how small, exhausted and brittle was the Allied force on

that dawn of the 14th, they might have swept through to the beaches. But they weren't certain. Obviously they thought the Fifth Army assault force was considerably larger than it was.

In this circumstance I see, with considerable reluctance, clear justification for the policy of military security often so annoying to war correspondents and public. Premature release of any formation identity which could have been used as a measuring stick of the strength of the assault force might have been fatal at that critical point of the battle.

Here, too, was proof of the deterioration of the German army. Gone were Hitler's brilliant blitz commanders of May, 1940; they are a slain generation of German manhood. Replacing them are men who lack confidence and ability, a combination of courage on the battlefield.

At about nine a.m. on the 14th the Germans renewed their counter-attack. But by this time the wavering Allied line had been bolstered at its weakest points.

By this time, too, the biggest, most violent, most concentrated air and naval bombardment ever mounted in close support of a land force had swung into full operation.

To appreciate the vicious nature of this onslaught by our navies and air forces, one must recall the mood of the British Navy in hue and cry after the *Bismarck* following the sinking of the *Hood* in the North Atlantic. Then, the Royal Navy, stung, hurt, infuriated, stalked its prey and flung itself like a clawing beast upon the pride of Hitler's high seas fleet.

So it was with American and British navies and air forces on the morning of the 14th. Word had been flashed during the night that the bridgehead was gravely endangered, our lines being lacerated. The result was breathtaking.

From fields in North Africa, Sicily and Middle East, every available heavy bomber, medium bomber, fighter-bomber and fighter made for the Salerno plain. Previous standards of close infantry support were left swirling in the slipstreams of our avenging planes. They zoomed low over the enemy in furious disorder, squadron upon squadron, wing upon wing. The sight of our planes, their roar, the crash of their bombs upon near-by enemy lines—these things acted as a tonic to our careworn troops. I noted more than one look up into the churning air under a cloudless sky and murmur, "Thank God for the air force."

At the same time the United States cruisers, *Philadelphia* and *Boise*, together with a flotilla of destroyers, moved inshore close to the mouth of the Sele, and loosed the deep-throated roar of dozens of 5 and 6-inch guns to join in the macabre symphony. Farther north, eleven British destroyers stood off the British beachhead and pumped shells into the enemy at Battipaglia.

Figures have been released on the air performance that day. During the

twenty-four-hour period our planes dropped 1,284 tons of bombs on the enemy, nine-tenths of a ton for each minute. The total of sorties for the same period is 1,888, more than one every minute. This does not take into account the millions of heavy calibre machine-gun bullets and small cannon shell fired from low-flying aircraft. More than eighty per cent. of this effort was made by United States aircraft.

On that day destroyers averaged more than one thousand rounds each; the cruisers between six hundred and one thousand rounds each.

This gigantic bombardment, reaching a climax on September 14 but continuing through to the 17th, literally tore the German forces from their moorings.

The enemy continued to attack all day of the 14th. In some places he drove our troops even closer to the sea, though his dangerous salient at the Sele could not advance an inch.

At four p.m. General Clark studied the battle report. German attacks were losing momentum. Our troops were steadying. The enemy's concentration area in the Battipaglia-Eboli-Altavilla triangle was being eaten away, yard by yard, by our naval and air bombardment. We had virtual domination of the skies.

Sensing the return of the initiative, Clark ordered a British armoured division ashore plus more American units. He could now afford to clog the roads and fields. His sensitive feel of the battlefield bade him prepare for the attack. Though his battlemap could not prove it, he knew the crisis was over.

Above: “And when the battle passes, their homes are shattered.” A view of Leonforte street where house-fighting raged bitterly.

Above: “The highway swings inland as it leaves Augusta and winds around the crests of mountains.” A view of Sicily’s easily defended highway system.

11

Victory Before Naples

PRIZE FIGHT FANS ARE familiar with a psychological moment which is not uncommon in hard-slugging heavyweight matches. One of the fighters has been taking a trimming during the early rounds. He is on the floor for a short count. Now he is on his feet again, bloody and somewhat shaky, but on his feet. His opponent rushes him. He weathers the blows. He begins slugging back, surprised to find his punches landing with effect. His opponent, dismayed by this unexpected resistance, glances sharply toward his corner for new advice. They stand back on their heels, exchanging blows evenly, viciously.

This is the psychological moment. The crowd surges to its feet. It senses a dramatic turn of events. The underdog has recovered. He is on even terms now. He hasn't begun to win yet, but the momentum of his comeback is driving him on, giving him new strength. . . .

In Salerno on the afternoon of September 14 we felt the impact of such a psychological moment. The battle raged at close quarters along the whole bridgehead front. The Fifth Army had recovered its strength and confidence, was slugging it out with the Germans. We hadn't begun to win yet; on some localized fronts we were being pushed back. In most places we were holding our own in wild, vicious fighting. There was no longer a valid line of demarcation between American and British formations. Near the line of the Sele, British and American troops fought shoulder to shoulder. At the point of the German salient, where fighting was heaviest, British and American units rushed forward to support one another as though they belonged to a single battalion. Out of the suffering and desperation of that afternoon, I think, the first Anglo-American army was born.

The battle raged. And as our air power screamed down upon the enemy, hour after hour, with increasing violence, our troops fought harder, more confidently. They knew now that the whole mighty strength of the Allies in the Mediterranean was being hurled in their support. They could hear the vicious hiss of naval shells passing overhead, and the sustained roar as the shells landed behind the enemy.

Toward nightfall the Germans gave ground—at long last—at the point of

their deeply thrust spearhead. It was not much—only a few hundred yards—but it was ground. Then the pace of battle slackened. The Germans were never much at night fighting. Our men dug their fox-holes where they stood.

Behind the lines, our bridgehead was now clogged with newly landed men and fighting vehicles. We could afford this now. We had complete domination of the air. We knew where the enemy was concentrated. We could use our superior resources as a battering ram. That evening, for the first time in three days, I saw General Clark smile.

There was good reason for the General's smile. He had regained complete control of the situation. His recovery moves were working like clockwork—on land, in the air, and at sea.

On the night of the 14th, I stood beside a country road two miles behind the Albanella front. Fresh American troops were moving up in single file. They whistled, looked cocky. Tanks were moving with them—dozens of Shermans rumbling to the front. There is nothing so cheering to infantry as to see tanks rolling forward to the front line. This night they were seeing more tanks than they had ever seen before.

The battle area was quiet. At ten p.m. the deep roar of multi-engined planes flying low was heard. We were mystified at first. Soon I spotted a U.S. Army air force officer observing from the bald top of a hill.

"This," he said, "will make you whistle. A parachute regiment is dropping along the beach. So far as I can see, it's going perfectly."

It did go perfectly, as we learned later. The whole regiment dropped in the assigned area, narrow as it was, without so much as a cracked ankle. The men formed up quickly and were in the thick of the infantry fighting before dawn.

Shortly after midnight, our sea power swung into terrifying action. Moving up close to the mouth of the Sele, opposite the deep German salient, four British warships, including the battleships *Warspite* and *Valiant*, loosed their 15-inch guns on the enemy's concentration area between the Sele and the Calore.

At dawn of the 15th, the enemy renewed his counter-attacks. But these were changed in character. They were no longer headlong smashes toward the beach. They were, in fact, rearguard actions. The German knew he had lost the bridgehead battle. He was trying to break off contact.

On the morning of the 15th, General Sir Harold Alexander, commander of the 15th Army Group, arrived in the bridgehead by destroyer. I was summoned to General Clark's tent to represent the Allied press.

For two hours Generals Alexander and Clark moved along the battle line. They crawled up hills, looked down on enemy positions only a few hundred yards distant. When they returned to headquarters, they gave me a very brief statement. Alexander uttered it in his quiet, matter-of-fact, rather impatient

manner.

"Well, how shall we put it?" he mused. "Let me see. It was a highly successful landing, opposed strongly by the Germans in position with tanks and guns two hundred yards from the sea. They pushed right back to the foot of the high mountains. It was a magnificent job of work—simply magnificent."

Then he thought for a moment. A smile flicked momentarily on his lips. "And now," he said with finality, "now we are pouring our troops, tanks and guns into the bridgehead. That's about it."

In my despatch to the outside world I quoted him directly. I could not describe the definite impression I gained from his words and his manner of emphasis. But I knew he felt the bridgehead battle was over, our offensive phase beginning.

General Alexander left to embark on his destroyer. Before he moved out of the camp, he met eight dust-covered British war correspondents who had driven up the coast road from Scalea, sixty miles distant. Our first land contact with the Eighth Army had been achieved.

Late that afternoon one of General Clark's aides strode triumphantly into the press hut. He looked around, smiled, spoke rapidly to us.

I rushed to my typewriter, tapped out a story I knew the outside world was waiting for—breathlessly.

"Fifth Army, Salerno area, September 15—For the first time since the Allied landing in Salerno Bay, the Germans today failed to mount a substantial counter-attack. They gave some indication that they are making a limited withdrawal from the salient they drove into the Allied bridgehead on Monday night and Tuesday morning. . . ."

On the 16th patrols of the Fifth Army probing the area south of the bridgehead shook hands with patrols of the Eighth Army. This information raced through the ranks of the Fifth Army. Men cheered.

On the same day the Germans began to withdraw from their salient. We occupied Albanella. Early on the morning of the 17th, Altavilla and Battipaglia were in our hands. In some places we had lost contact with the enemy, who was retreating rapidly to the north.

We were now landing reinforcements and equipment in lavish quantity. Every field in the bridgehead was jam-packed.

On the morning of the 18th, General Clark mounted his offensive for Naples. The Fifth Army moved north in wide circling movement with its hinge in the mountains overlooking the Naples plain. This hinge had been held for us by Commandos and Rangers throughout the bitter days of crisis. Eboli fell. Then San Cipriano and Montecorvina and Compagna. The Americans were winging out to the right, the British pushing through the mountain passes.

Naples was in sight.

General Mark Wayne Clark draped his lanky frame over a ridiculously small chair in the confined quarters of his caravan. He fingered a single sheet of paper and his tired eyes regarded its lettering for a few moments. Then he passed the paper to me.

"I wrote that out a few minutes ago," he said. "How does it strike you?"

This was a typical gesture of the General's. He liked to have one or two correspondents in for a chat. Believing thoroughly in the function of the press in war, he often seeks a reaction from the correspondents accredited to his headquarters. This is not a patronizing attitude. There is nothing studied about this gaunt, open-handed man.

The paper he handed me was his first order of the day.

"As your commander, I want to congratulate every officer and enlisted man in the Fifth Army on the accomplishment of their mission of landing on the west coast of Italy. . . . We have arrived at our initial objective—our beachhead is secure. . . . I am highly gratified by the efficient manner in which the British and American troops have worked side by side. Their performance has justified the confidence placed in them by the people of the United Nations. . . ."

This was on the morning of the 16th. The Germans had begun to withdraw under pressure of our heavily reinforced army. The bridgehead phase was completed, the advance on Naples ready to be launched.

"There are two good stories in this," I said, handing back the paper. "One is the victory in the bridgehead battle. The other, more important perhaps from the perspective of post-war historians, is the successful functioning of the first Anglo-American army. Something has happened here which is even bigger than the battle of Salerno Bay."

The General smiled and nodded.

"It's been wonderful the way British and American troops have fought shoulder to shoulder," he said. "And that's no idle phrase. They have fought literally shoulder to shoulder."

"When I first met the British generals coming under my command," he went on, warming to his subject, "I told them quite plainly, 'Some of the things you do, I may think are all wrong. I'll tell you so right across the table. And you may think some of the things I do are plain crazy. I want you to tell me so, without hesitation, right across the table. In that way we'll be able to work things out together.' "

"It has worked well. The army has fought a fine action. I'm as proud of the British troops as I am of our own Americans."

As a Canadian, born of a country that is spiritually bound to both the United States and the British Commonwealth, I felt it was appropriate that I should bear witness in Salerno Bay to the birth and growth of the first Anglo-

American army.

The process took place in a single searing week. What was an International army only in theory at zero on September 9 had become a single fighting force on September 16. Fierce German blows hammered the Allies into a steel-hardened unity; the critical nature of the struggle dissolved national identities. Men in the thick of battle ask no more of their fellows than that they show courage and unselfishness. The screaming fury of seven days produced the thoroughly co-ordinated international army allied statesmen have merely dreamed of for many times seven years.

Not once during the mounting crisis (and certainly not after it had passed) did I hear an American soldier speak disparagingly of the British, or vice-versa. I cannot recall hearing the words "Limey" and "Yank" used with ugly inflection on the Salerno front. The one-for-all policy laid down by General Clark obtained in the last exhausted foot soldier.

Yet there was ample opportunity for temper and recrimination. Because a British formation was so badly mauled on the third day, footsore Americans had to move into the line of the Sele. Because the Americans broke dangerously on the fourth night, British troops had to slog through to support them. When tanks and guns were needed quickly, there was no question asked as to whether the nearest available equipment was British or American. There was no time to ask. There were lapses by both sections of the Fifth Army.

In this confusing, often discouraging time, heritage and past history never intruded themselves. Nor did pride and protocol. Rear-Admiral Richard L. Conolly, a storied American seadog, insisted on serving under British Commodore G. N. Oliver on a vital naval operation. In the magnificent Ranger-Commando action, a British brigadier fought under command of an American colonel.

When figures were totalled at the end of the bridgehead phase, it was found that the British suffered almost twice as many casualties (dead and wounded) as the Americans. On the other hand, Americans supplied most of the troops, planes and material which saved the bridgehead during the twenty-four-hour action on the night and day of September 13-14.

Here were sharp and bloody pegs on which to hang distrust and dissension. Yet the men marched and fought together, devotedly, unquestioningly, brothers in arms.

On my return to the civilization and society of the big North African cities, it struck me as peculiar, almost comic, that only in this comfortable safety I should find the type of Britisher and American who speaks of his ally with snicker and disparagement. Fighting men at the front line don't speak this way. Nor do they think this way. Perhaps the moral is that a man fighting for his life doesn't believe in elbowing his friend.

By September 18 General Clark was in position to resume his original plan for a wide wheeling movement to squeeze out Naples. The rapid advance of the Eighth Army had forced the Germans to retire from the whole area south and east of the bridgehead. The Fifth Army pushed its mighty weight in a northward drive.

On the 22nd, when the drama of Salerno had passed into history, my newspaper instructed me to return to the Canadians advancing in the western half of Italy.

The next morning I bade General Clark and his staff good-bye. The parting was almost tearful, at least for me.

Before leaving, I toured the battle area once more. The ground was familiar to me as a park in my home city. My jeep rolled down to the beach where I landed, through the little town of Paestum glinting in the morning sun. The bomb-holes were still there. Enemy pillboxes strewn with lacerated gun-barrels looked like ruins of another war.

I paused at the American cemetery, quiet and orderly, on the greenest field in the Salerno plain just north of Paestum. Slowly I passed the forest by the Sele where we had spent the tortured evening of September 13. A few miles north the town of Battipaglia was a grey and deserted ruin; no longer a town. I moved on to Eboli.

Here I saw evidence of the most terrifying bombardment the mind can envisage. Our naval guns and planes had done a thorough job on this area of German concentration. Every tree looked as though lightning had struck it. The fields were cratered in such perfect pattern on so gargantuan a scale that one imagined only a supernatural hand reaching out of the sky could achieve such ordered destruction. I began to understand why the Germans failed to exploit their break-through. Behind them there was nothing but death and desolation.

Then I drove through Salerno and into the winding mountain roads where Rangers and Commandos made spartan history. These roads were full of our trudging troops and rolling vehicles.

I climbed a summit to an observation post. Below were the plain of Naples, and Vesuvius, and beyond the bend the first buildings of the great port of Italy. Our troops, American and British, were squirming through the roads, making ready to spill out on the plain.

I clambered down the mountainside. My jeep hummed and raced away from Salerno Bay.

Above: Major-General Guy Simonds, the Canadian commander, examines the first Italian general captured in the Sicilian campaign.

Above: “The battle swarms over communities.” A view of the once pretty town of Regalbuto, Sicily, as Canadian tanks moved through in pursuit of the enemy.

12
Men in Battle

IT IS A POPULAR LEGEND THAT the Britisher is a good soldier, particularly in adversity; that the American is a dashing warrior in a battle of movement; that the Canadian is a rollicking cowboy in any kind of fight; that the Italian has no heart for physical suffering; and that the German is the best all-round soldier in the world. So far as I have been able to observe on the battlefields of the Mediterranean, popular legend in this instance seems to be properly founded in fact.

There are exceptions and limitations, of course. The most dashing troops I have seen in action belong to the British 78th Division; and perhaps the most courageous suicide action of this war was undertaken by a combat team of an American paratroop regiment that dropped on the main German concentration point at Avellina during the Salerno crisis and suffered almost total casualties. Commandos and Rangers vie with one another in gallantry without regard for popularly held national characteristics. The German in the last days of the Tunisian pocket was the worst soldier in the world.

Nor is the Italian always a music-loving mollycoddle. His cruelty to prisoners in the desert left a permanent scar on veterans of the Eighth Army. Our men preferred German captivity to Italian on every count. A Guards captain who escaped from an Italian prison camp during the confusion following capitulation, told me a harrowing story. Together with thousands of South African, Indian and British troops, he was taken at Tobruk in the wake of the Knightsbridge disaster. Without water and in sickening heat they were marched to Bengasi. In the centre of a compound the Italians placed a fifty-gallon cistern overflowing with water. The gates were then opened to admit ten thousand thirst-maddened prisoners. Italian officers had cameras placed at strategic points to take pictures of the ensuing riot.

These are exceptions. I could annotate many others. Armies are made up of individuals and there is no inscrutable law under which men must consult tradition or national character before acting in a given set of circumstances. But there can be no doubt that heritage plays with immense magnetic effect on men in mass and that the pulls and strains of national structure shape an army more acutely than they would a particular segment of society. A war-time

army, after all, is the sharp echo of a nation's turmoil; it is the emergency product of an unselfish unity welded by common anxiety and powered by common hope. It is tradition on the march.

It has been attested in almost every western campaign of two great wars that the British soldier makes his best effort when the battle is tough and the result in doubt, when conditions for mere existence are appalling and death is an imminent prospect. Given this set of circumstances, the American is not as superbly effective. Yet when an offensive is rolling and the objective clearly set, when the password is Forward! though the enemy is fiercely resisting, the American soldier is superior in action. In both cases, the men may be equally brave and casualties equally heavy. There is this stern distinction in their behaviour: The British soldier will face death and fight with calm discipline. The American soldier will face victory and die in the act of reaching for it. The one regards death with Old World resignation. The other abhors death and looks to achievement; he is a child of the New World.

Operationally the distinction has been significant. During dogged, bitter fighting under wretched winter conditions in Tunisia, British troops distinguished themselves for staying quality and high morale. The American performance was indifferent. On the other hand, no operation in North Africa was more brilliant than Major-General Omar Bradley's climactic thrust along the north shore to Ferryville and Bizerte; when the offensive was ready, the Second American Corps showed fabulous verve. Another case in point was the 36th American Division at Salerno. Under German hammer blows on September 13-14, it all but disintegrated. But once the beachhead was secured, reinforced, and the move forward prepared, the same 36th fought and conquered with immense spirit on the outside wing of the Allied pivot manœuvre on Naples.

I think I came to recognize this distinction when I saw my first American battle dead at Salerno. I was touched by the desolate tragedy of the moment. It was an uncomfortable emotional experience for me. And unfamiliar. Many times I walked with Eighth Army burial parties as they moved moodily over the Sicilian hills. Now and again I watched them bury a man I knew and I was saddened. But somehow I felt he went into battle fully content to face death, and when it reached him, he met it without regret. My first encounter with American dead brought a reaction far more bitter. The war seemed a great deal harder to bear. Though I did not know these dead, I felt keen hurt.

Perhaps the explanation lies in the manner of each country's approach to war. There is a marked difference. The American youth now fighting has been brought up to believe war is a futile business, an unforgivable waste of life and substance. The revulsion against foreign conflict which enveloped the United States during the Republican twenties was succeeded by the dreamy idealism

of American life in the Rooseveltian thirties. When the President declaimed in every campaign speech, "I hate war!" he echoed American thought with rare political acumen. And though American youth moved quickly to the conflict after Pearl Harbour, war was still a stupid business and death on the battlefield a desolate fate not within the traditional orbit of the American way of life.

There is a subtle difference in the British youth's approach to war. Whether he springs from a drab mining village or from Belgravia, he has been conscious from childhood that death in the service of his country is a lively factor in his expectation of life. Latter day idealism has impinged but sparingly on his attitude toward war. His earliest childhood recollection was probably a picture of his grandfather in uniform of the South African campaign. The medals of an uncle killed in Flanders were his family's proudest possession. His induction into the army came naturally to him; it was part of a pattern he could trace for as many generations as his family tree recorded. His pride in Britain stemmed chiefly from achievement in battle.

Neither glorifies war. But to the British youth service in war is a natural adjunct to his attainment of adult status; to the American it is a tragic interruption in his primary ambition to build a life for himself in the vast spaces of his vibrant country. The one accepts death as a link with a great past, the other decries death because it has put him off from the future. That the British soldier dies—shall we put it brusquely?—better than the American is neither a mark of bravery nor a reflection on courage. It is the inevitable result of two distinct threads of development. And it is a cold circumstance of the battlefield.

There are comparisons to be drawn on a more practical scale. American equipment is superior to British, particularly in such personal devices as helmets, webbing, messtins and water bottles. American quartermasters in the field have little Legree in them, probably because their supplies are lavish and accounting is haphazard. The result is that American troops in the line look cleaner and more soldierly than their British comrades. American rations are far superior to British. In Sicily I moved with the Eighth Army for thirty days before a bakery unit was finally put into operation. At Salerno most American troops had freshly-baked rolls on D plus 5—while the battle of the bridgehead teetered on the brink of disaster.

Field leadership on the high level is excellent in the American forces. On the other hand, their junior officers and non-coms are generally of an inferior grade compared with their opposite numbers in the British army. This is to be expected of a non-military nation that has raised an army of seven millions out of a permanent nucleus of about three hundred thousand. In tough, holding actions, unit leadership is tested to the full, and the British sergeant and junior officer display a quality which can be developed only by a continuing military

tradition and a peace-time professional army of size and standing.

Welfare activity—mail, cigarettes, entertainment, spiritual and social organization—has been developed by the United States Army to a degree never before attained in war. The British soldier operating in an American area feels like a stepchild looking in from the outside at a Christmas party. He wonders why he should be paid so much less, and ignored so much more by his country. Out of this resentment rises a barrier to full Anglo-American unity in the field. It seems to me that the English-speaking powers, having resolved to mix their formations into common armies and to fight together through to Berlin and Tokyo, would find it profitable to standardize the welfare of men who must march shoulder to shoulder.

The Canadian soldier is a reflection of his own country. He draws both on the inspiration of the North American continent and on the tradition of his close British connection. He has a full content of animal spirit; too much, perhaps, to be as coldly effective as the British Tommy in a tight action. He displays also a natural approach to battle which indicates within him a strong strain of Old World affinity. He may turn out to be a combination of the best qualities of his British cousin and his American neighbour; it is too early to tell. When I left the Canadians, they were pushing along the Adriatic coast and they had not yet been tested by a formal German counter-attack. Thus far they had accomplished everything required of them, and had laid the foundations of a tough reputation by giving no quarter in any of the limited actions they fought between Pachino beach and the Foggia plain.

The Canadians draw on the British army for tradition. Their system of distinctive regiments is an outgrowth of colonial days when British units garrisoned the sprawling country. The officer corps dips deeply into Empire history for its inspiration. Family pride is a strong factor in moulding the standard of behaviour for Canadian officers; in a substantial percentage of cases this family pride stems from an ancestral service with the British army. The American mode of life and thought, so thoroughly established in all other Canadian fields of endeavour, has scarcely affected Canadian fighting forces. In his bearing as a soldier the Canadian inclines to the pull of his British connection.

Canadian military organization is more liberal than the British, not as blatantly democratic as the American. In all auxiliary matters it traces a carefully selected middle path between its two great influences; pay, entertainment, welfare—these are patterned on the British method but somewhat liberalized by the American influence in Dominion thought.

Although I have spent many months with Canadian forces, it is hardly possible for me to set down final conclusions on their battle characteristics. In the Mediterranean no large numbers of them have been in a position of

desperate crisis. The performance of the Canadian brigade in the Hongkong tragedy is a secret enclosed behind the impenetrable barricades of a Japanese prison camp. The complications of Dieppe make for difficulties in assessing the fighting quality of the two Canadian brigades involved. The operation was experimental and excessively difficult. The high percentage of Canadians taken prisoner may be due to thoroughly prepared German defence plans, or to faulty field leadership on our side, or to the lack of fighting spirit within the men. The latter possibility is unlikely, if one is to judge by the almost terrifying zest for battle displayed by the Canadians in their romp through Sicily and southern Italy.

I have seen enough of Canadian behaviour under fire, however, to realize that Dominion troops have distinctive characteristics of operational significance. If they are a true reflection of their rugged and spacious country, they will turn out to be the most effective shock troops in our military roster.

I have set down this catalogue of our military characteristics in order to point up the advantages of a closer fighting collaboration than we have yet developed during the western offensive. Admittedly we have taken some strides, particularly in the Mediterranean theatre, toward merging our forces so that the best characteristics of each is a contributory factor in the welding of the most powerful possible machine. Anglo-American military unity reached its highest point of development at Salerno where a British and an American corps were forced by unforeseen circumstance to fight on common terrain in a restricted area. A purely American force might have been swept from the bridgehead. A purely British force possibly would have made Salerno beach into a long-term Tobruk of small value in the urgent strategic pattern which required prompt capture of Naples. The combination of British doggedness and American urge for headlong movement furnished the proper elements for success of the operation.

This is only a small beginning. Much more must be done. The barriers of military imagination must be extended. National pride must develop a new set of values in keeping with the new ideal of common effort. The inordinate rivalry for national credits must be enclosed within sensible limits. Men like Eisenhower must feel completely free to apply their own realistic conceptions to the building of a proper force for a particular task. The best qualities of our various forces can be moulded into an invincible body if leaders of good will are free from such curbs as national credits and home politics. The administrative problems of a mixed force can be solved by a realistic application of the theory of the common pool so often boasted by Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt. But an essential prerequisite to building the ideal English-speaking army is the establishment of a common standard of pay, personal equipment and troop welfare.

It cannot be argued that men of different nationalities won't fight well together. They *have* fought well together when military circumstance so willed it.

Perhaps the most stunning proof of the unity that comes to men in battle was furnished by German forces in Sicily. Their skilful delaying action was fought with the aid of a substantial percentage of press-ganged Poles and Yugoslavs. I spoke to many prisoners in German uniform who were conscripted from the occupied countries. Once in our hands, they were bitter against the Germans and formed coteries of their own in temporary prison cages. I recall one—a Pole from the Poznan district. He told me the Gestapo came to his home one midnight, removed his father and his wife to a concentration camp, and gave him a severe beating. The next morning military police yanked him from his bed and transported him to an army camp for training.

There were more than one hundred Poles in a single artillery regiment opposing the Canadians in Agira valley, all of them, according to my informant, anxious to give themselves up the moment an opportunity presented itself. Until that time arrived, however, they fought effectively, sometimes magnificently, as part of the German army.

Here was an example of men of ill-will welded into an efficient unit by the bare application of military discipline. Who will say, then, that British and American troops must of necessity fight in their own national formations?

The superb quality of the German soldier was best illustrated by a British brigadier when he attempted to explain to me the principal reason for our failure to "bag" the German forces in Sicily. "The real trouble was this," he said, "after three years of blitz tactics, the Germans have become expert at defensive warfare. And old Jerry, after having his way in the air for so long, has now learned to fight without any air cover at all. He learns fast because he is perfectly disciplined. He's really quite a terrific fellow."

There is general agreement among all troops in the Mediterranean that the German soldier is "quite a terrific fellow." His courage and stamina have never been in doubt. The standard of his training is probably the world's highest, and he demonstrates this in battle by an uncanny skill with his weapons. It was the accuracy of German mortar fire, directed by small parties of troops who stood their ground with fanatical bravery, that preserved the retracting enemy line in Sicily to the very end.

The German is a curious combination of chivalry and ruthlessness. He has one standard of morality on the battlefield; quite another toward civilian populations. Our troops, captured by the enemy and later rescued by our swift advance, reported his treatment of prisoners highly correct. On one occasion a Canadian officer was relieved of his binoculars while being escorted back of

the lines by his German captors. He complained to the interrogating officer, and an hour later the binoculars were returned with apologies. He escaped after being in German hands three days. The German has a vast respect for military honours. No matter how fast his retreat, the neatness of the graves of his dead was quickly apparent amidst the litter of his hurried departure.

On the other hand, his treatment of civilians was marked by methodical beastliness. In the little town of Rionero in southern Italy a retreating German rearguard paused at a farmyard to gather a few chickens. An aged farmer proceeded to defend his livestock with a spray of buckshot. Two or three of the Germans were nicked. The commanding officer immediately gathered up the first twenty-one male civilians he could find and shot them on the roadside. Our troops arriving an hour later found the women of the community wailing over the bodies of their dead. The city of Potenza was garrisoned by the Germans with utter correctness until the capitulation of Italy. On that day every substantial home in the city was looted.

The explanation lies in the fact that the German has been educated to respect the military virtues. Nothing else matters. A worthy opponent is a man to be respected. A helpless civilian counts for no more than a bit of shrubbery which may be used for camouflage or cut away if it interferes with ranging.

An iron discipline has been superimposed on the German's inbred characteristics of physical and mental hardness. This has made him a first-class warrior. It has also robbed him of such human qualities as he was endowed with in his early innocence. When he betrays fear, it is of a primary, almost sub-human nature. When he displays correctness in behaviour, it is on orders. When ruthlessness is ordered, he displays ruthlessness. He does as he is told. He works according to a plan laid down for him. When there is no plan laid down for him, he doesn't work. He is lost.

In Sicily and south Italy, the strategy of retreat adopted by the German High Command did not affect the soldier's morale. He fell back according to strict orders, and with considerable brilliance. In the last days of Tunisia, he was bereft of a plan. So he collapsed.

The iron discipline which has made the German an excellent soldier has also made him brittle of intellect. Endless retreat will not affect his morale so long as his command has made provision for retreat. He will go on fighting with the weapons and the plan furnished him. His mind will not be clouded by visions of the inevitable end of the road. He is too steel-hardened a soldier. But one day his High Command will reach an impasse. Suddenly there will be no plan. And the German soldier will collapse. The end will have arrived on the wings of a moment.

The Italian capacity for war can be dismissed in the following manner: On the day of Italy's capitulation, a prison camp thirty miles north of Termoli

holding four thousand British and American officers was guarded by a full brigade of Mussolini's best. The Italians outside the gates were jubilant about the news, no less than the officer prisoners inside. The colonel commanding the brigade made a little speech about the loathsome Germans, then proceeded to wait for orders. A few hours later a cloud of dust in the distance heralded the approach of two truck-loads of Germans, perhaps forty men in all. The colonel looked upon his four thousand men, then decided his plan of action. When the German trucks screeched to a stop, the colonel stepped up to the first German officer and with a bow and a flourish, offered his sword. The Italian troops filed past, dropping their weapons in neat piles along the road. The prison camp was secured and the four thousand British and American officers were joined by four thousand Italians.

One volley would have wiped out the Germans. If the colonel had guts.

13

Obituary Uttered by a Prince

THE LILTING COUNTRYSIDE OF south-central Italy bloomed with the fullness of early autumn. The war had mercifully winged swiftly north and the land was placid. The hills flowing out of the base of the Appennines were green and fragrant; and trees in the valleys were heavy with apples and peaches. Through this lovely land, beating new paths on the verges of every road and country lane, heading south on the ties of every lonely railway track, trudged the human wreckage of Fascism's shattered grandeur. Mussolini's erstwhile conquerors were going home.

I saw them everywhere as my jeep spun across the leg of Italy from Salerno to Foggia. Thousands upon thousands, turning their backs upon war, stumbled moodily toward the communities of the south. It was almost a month since they wandered away from their encampments in the north, taking advantage of German confusion at the capitulation. Now some of them were dropping out of the silent lines as they reached their homes and farms. The rest trudged on, their feet wrapped in rags, each looking with hollow eyes upon the sagging shoulders of the man in front. They no longer looked up at our passing vehicles. Gone even were the diffident smiles and V-signs we saw in Sicily. These were broken men. Endlessly they shuffled south, some clad only in underwear, others bared to the waist, all too weary to know embarrassment as they passed the market-places of little towns. Those who had tunics used them to bundle the few belongings they salvaged from the barracks—a rusty mess-tin, a water-bottle, perhaps a bit of fruit picked up on the wayside. Eight years ago Mussolini summoned them to conquer an empire. Now they were returning home naked and footsore—and these were the spoils.

On the outskirts of a little town called Serre, I watched a tall, spare youth drop out of line and push open the gate of a fine country house. He did not look around as he walked with measured tread along the garden path; this was his home. He wore a tattered undershirt; his breeches, blue with a faded yellow stripe along the seam, hung loosely on his hipbones and fell below his knees. His face was dirty with stubble, his thin, long nose white with dust. His black hair curled over his neck.

I stopped to watch him, and in the mind's eye I could see his departure for

the wars perhaps a year ago. Proud and handsome, his officer's tunic fitting snugly on his lean body, the yellow stripe on his breeches running into black riding boots, spick and shiny. He strode down the garden path, turned probably to throw a smiling salute to his family, then drove away to the wars.

Now he had returned. No hero's welcome awaited him. The balcony was bare. He sat on the steps and looked into his cupped hands, as though pondering the bitter moment of homecoming. As he rose and faced the door, an elderly man came from within and stood on the threshold. They regarded each other for a moment as strangers would, then fell into each other's arms and embraced.

Halfway across Italy, on the main lateral highway between Salerno and the Adriatic, stands the city of Potenza. It is built in the centre of a spacious valley cupped out of the rugged peaks which range the length of the Italian peninsula. From the highway which follows the rim of the valley, Potenza looks like a "big little city" of the American west. It has a cluster of ten-storey buildings, a sports stadium and a towering city hall; and the surrounding countryside is wild and empty.

On the outskirts of Potenza, a Canadian divisional headquarters was temporarily located. Here I stopped for the night to receive a welcome and much amusing chatter from newsmen I hadn't seen since the end of Sicily. I was the butt of most of the amusement and naturally so, because I looked little better than some Italian troops trudging the highways. In three exciting weeks at Salerno I had developed not only a crop of hair which fell over my ears but also a flourishing community of body lice.

The field hygiene section solved the louse problem with zeal and thoroughness, and the next morning I drove into Potenza to be shorn. Seeking a barber, I came upon the scion of the ancient House of Savoy, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Umberto of Italy.

Barber shops in Italy have a tradition. Like hospitals, parlour houses and other institutions devoted to public service, they never close. No matter how fierce a battle for a town, when we burst into the main street we found the barber shops, those that were not wrecked, open for business and filled with customers.

Knowing this, I was disconcerted and not a little mystified to find the barber shops of Potenza empty. The doors swung open, but no barbers greeted me and the American-imported chairs stood desolate in disuse. The streets, too, were curiously empty for a sunburst midweek morning. Obviously something extraordinary was happening, and a quick tour of the town revealed what it was.

In the central square, at the head of which stood the imposing (former) Fascist palace, almost the entire population of Potenza stood in respectful

silence. The centre of attention was not the palace but the somewhat less pretentious Albergo Lombardo, and particularly a low grey touring car which was parked at its entrance. Two Italian infantrymen, complete with sidearms, stood beside the car. Inside the hotel, it was whispered, was Umberto.

The small front hall of Albergo Lombardo was crowded and noisy, filled apparently with the privileged class of Potenza. The Prince, it seems, was receiving the town's notables in the dining-room and I sought at once to be included in the list. I had no trouble. An aide-de-camp, a smooth-looking individual who introduced himself as Major Francesco Campello, greeted me as though I were an Amgot food custodian and insisted that His Royal Highness was not only willing but most anxious to receive me. My uniform must have been impressive. I wore a Canadian badge on my cap, American officers' insignia on my shirt collar, and the flashes of a British war correspondent on my epaulettes—a walking delegate for the United Nations.

Major Campello flung open the doors to the dining-room. Umberto stood in the centre of the room. He wore the uniform of a Marshal of Italy with a mourning band on his left sleeve. Forming a semi-circle behind him were civic officials and clergy of Potenza. I sensed that my presence didn't add to the gaiety of the occasion. The officials glared at me with helpless anxiety, as though I were about to kick the royal posterior; and Umberto had a hangdog look on his face which didn't strike me as being particularly regal. Mike Romanoff would have made a better fist of it.

I stopped about six paces from the Prince and saluted as smartly as I knew how. The sense of relief that filled the room could have been measured and sold by the yard. Major Campello beamed upon me, and smiles broke out on all the faces in the background. Umberto stepped forward and shook my hand, warmly, I thought. The situation was well in hand—my hand—and I determined to make the most of it. Not often does a man who goes by the name of Shapiro find himself master of a situation involving the Royal House of Savoy. The face of old Europe must have wrinkled slightly upon that moment in the dining-room of Albergo Lombardo.

"Would you mind telling me in your own words what happened on the night of the capitulation?" Thus in the manner of a reporter asking a distracted Mrs. Jones exactly how she fought off a masher at the corner of Lexington and 32nd.

"Yes, I will," he said. He spoke English readily and without trace of an accent. "I was with my troops just south of Rome that evening and I decided to go into the city, actually to dine at the palace—"

"What evening was that?"

"The evening of September the seventh—yes, the seventh."

"And what made you decide to go to Rome?"

"I really don't know why I happened to go to the palace that night. I decided merely on a whim, I suppose. In any case, it was fortunate that I did because it was very soon after dinner that we heard the Germans were moving in to occupy the capital."

"Didn't you expect them?"

"No—not quite. We heard so many rumours and stories, we didn't know quite what their reaction would be. Or yours." This last with a faint smile.

"In any case, my father the King decided immediately he must carry on his duties in a place not occupied either by the British or the Germans. At that time, you will remember, the British had not yet landed at Brindisi. We left the palace very early the next morning—"

"Who were 'we'?"

"My father and mother, their personal staffs, and Marshal Badoglio and certain members of his administration—let me see, and of course myself. I was in the last car."

"What time was this?"

"I would say between five and six in the morning."

"Did you sneak out a back exit of the palace or—?"

"Oh, no. Our party drove out the main gateway. We could hear the German tanks coming into the city at the time."

At this point, Major Campello smiled at Umberto and cut into the conversation. "There was no question of going out any back entrance. The King wore a full field marshal's uniform and the Queen was magnificently composed. Most magnificent, I assure you."

"Your Highness," I said, "how did you get through the German lines?"

"You see, we went by motor to Pescara which we reached in a few hours. We remained at a place near Pescara until nightfall and then we boarded a motor torpedo boat of the Italian Navy which brought us to Brindisi."

"But didn't you meet any Germans?"

"Oh, yes, quite near Pescara. But they didn't stop us. We went right through. I was really concerned about my wife and the babies. Luckily they were spending some time in the mountains just an hour's drive from the Swiss border. We have a sort of summer chalet up there, and they got into Switzerland that night. The British government was kind enough to inform me just the other day that they're quite well."

"I would like a little more information on how you got through the German lines."

Umberto was behaving like a witness with a hazy memory. "You know," he said, his eyes suddenly brightening with the light of recollection. "When Mussolini fell, the German soldiers in Italy heard a rumour that Hitler was killed. They were fairly jumping with joy. They believed the war was over.

When we capitulated I believe the Germans thought everything was finished. I think that's why our cars got through without interference."

"But they did stop you, didn't they?"

Here Major Campello cut in once more. "Yes, they stopped us, but I don't think they recognized us as the royal party. They looked into one or two of the cars and probably thought we were army officers on a tour of the front. They hadn't heard anything around Pescara that would make them stop us. The situation was very liquid—*very* liquid."

Major Campello looked at me with eyes that pleaded for no more questions about getting past the German lines. I shrugged my shoulders.

"Your Highness, do you think the Germans will make a battlefield of Rome?"

Umberto nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I am afraid so," he said. "We thought at first they might retire north of the capital and respect Rome as an open city but apparently they propose to fight all the way from the Volterno."

"You commanded an army group which included German troops, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of them?"

"Oh, the German Army has deteriorated since the beginning of the war. It is not the same army now. By no means. Of course, some divisions are still excellent—really excellent—but the general level of the army is much below the expected German standard."

He stopped to stroke his chin. "Besides, you have the air. That means so much. I know so well. When we were fighting you in Sicily I had many narrow escapes from your bombing. It was fearful."

"Your Highness, when did you know Italy must get out of the war?"

Umberto's reply was prompt and to the point. "After your first advance from the beaches in Sicily. We knew then it was no use."

I was enjoying myself thoroughly. Umberto was answering my questions as though under a third degree. "Tell me this. Why didn't the Royal family realize from the first that war against the Allies was a mistake?"

The question shocked Umberto. He smiled with dullish humour, glanced at the horrified Major Campello, then lowered his head, revealing a sizable bald spot. Finally he looked at me and laughed.

"As you say in America, it's one of those things."

Major Campbello broke in once more, this time to say that the royal automobile was refuelled and ready for travel. Umberto smiled with relief. "Thank you," he said. "——"

"Just one more question, Your Highness. What do you think of the form of the future Italian government?"

Quick glances shot between Campbello and Umberto. They whispered in Italian. Then Campbello announced with considerable gusto: “The Crown Prince is absolutely clear on this point. A free government elected by the will of the people. Of course, we will have a free election as soon as this situation is settled.”

“Well,” I started—but the Prince was now shaking my hand like a pump handle. “We will discuss matters again,” he said. “Please come to see me in Naples.”

I followed the party to the door. The crowd outside handclapped and shouted, “Evviva Savoia!” The Prince saluted and waved as he stepped into his car. Campello was about to take his seat beside the driver when he spotted me standing at the door of the albergo. He rushed up and whispered in my ear. “That’s the way it is everywhere we go. The House of Savoy is almost a religion with the people. They have faith in the King and the King has faith in them. Because of this, Italy will live!” He squeezed my arm like a Tammany politician sealing a vote, then hopped back into the car.

The crowd’s handclapping merged into cheers as the car moved away. I stood there wondering on the future of Italy.

The next day I crossed to the eastern coast of Italy, bumped through the ruins of Foggia, and joined the Eighth Army advancing up the Adriatic. The crash of our artillery seemed of small moment on that day. I was thinking of the Royal Umberto and of Bill Donaldson, son of a Glasgow stoker, who fought in Spain. The one a prince, the other a man. The one hopping from one side of the line to the other, seeking only to perpetuate his privilege. The other seeing the right and moving to defend it. The one heir to an ancient and tottering throne. The other lying in an unmarked grave but leaving a fabulous legacy of hope to countless millions who will never know his name.

The guns shattered the rainswept sky and out of their thunder was emerging the new Europe. While Crown Prince Umberto struggled with a dying dynasty, Bill Donaldson rotting on the Aragon plain was founding a future. No palace for the stoker’s son. The thousands of troops advancing through the smoke of battle were his living monument. The crash of a hundred guns over the distant hills was an echo of his silent voice.

The challenge is fear. Bill Donaldson moved forward to meet it. Alone. Unsung. And challenged, he knew the password. He knew it in his anguish and his terror. It brought strength to his bare hands and purpose to his common heart. The password? Not courage, nor cunning. Nor tradition. Nor glory. The challenge is fear. And the password is faith.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *They Left the Back Door Open* by Lionel Shapiro]