

Sicily Landing Like Picnic Compared With Salerno

By ALFRED WAGG.

Aboard Flagship of Allied Amphibious Forces, Sept. 9 (Delayed).

(AP).—While the radios this morning were announcing Allied celebrations of the Italian armistice, a great force of British and United States troops were being subjected to air and land artillery fire that made Sicily seem like a Sunday School girls' picnic.

As the northern portion of the invasion force passed the famed Isle of Capri last night, when the first news of the armistice was being received, we got our first air attack and, though weak, it forecast quite definitely what the beaches had in store for us.

Just after dark we entered the Gulf of Salerno and were greeted by flares from aircraft and more raids. A few minutes later shore batteries from Sorrento tried to range the ships, but fell short. This, coming on top of the radio-reported armistice, made it obvious that the Germans intended to fight to the finish.

As midnight passed and day began, this flagship and landing craft approached only to have the shore batteries begin heavy shelling from the heights behind the beaches which tower above 4,000 feet.

Battery Positions Revealed.

The zero hour of our attack this morning was set for 3:30. At the appointed time of 3:15 the naval bombardment was focused a few miles south of Salerno, where sandy terrain and sharply receding beaches appeared perfect for landing. The bombardment, though reduced in amount on account of the armistice, still helped to draw shore fire, thus revealing the battery positions.

Shells from specially appointed ships burst along the first line of enemy defenses, which included barbed wire entanglements, fortified trenches and heavily concreted pill boxes.

Several British units went in right behind the terrifying wave of explosives which cleared the way over limited fronts. The first British troops in this sector set foot ashore at 3:50 o'clock.

As the troops sprang ashore, rifle and machine gunning echoed along the beaches. Waves of assault craft hit the beaches successively, with increasingly bigger stuff following along.

As in Sicily, small landing craft hit the beaches first. After sappers cut a mine free route across the beach, the enemy gunnery increased. The hitch here has been our inability to get larger landing ships ashore and the small craft, which have been spending the

morning ferrying troops, are dodging the fire of enemy land batteries.

This sector has been the toughest yet. It was uncertain in the first hours whether or not our troops could establish themselves firmly. The lack of communications later was found to have been due to bomb damage to radios.

With daylight, reports began to indicate that our troops ashore were getting a hold on this slice of lowland which lies like a horse-shoe between the mountain background and the southward terrain.

A landing craft carrying tanks was dive-bombed twice on her way to the beach. When she hit shallow water she stuck aground and had to arrange pontoons for bridging the gap between the beach and her ramp. I watched salvo after salvo splatter her decks with shell fragments. About 30 minutes ago I watched this same craft leave the beach.

The climax thus far came when the Germans pushed the centre of our invading line back on to "green beach." Then at 1:11 p.m. British troops were thrown back on to the beaches.

Four British destroyers were thrown into action, checking the shore batteries, while reserve troops were rushed ashore, just in time to stop the German thrust which threatened to cut our forces in two.

The first day ends with the thrust ashore continuing after the morning delay.