

# SICILIAN DIARY

Editor's note—Here is Ross Munro's diary of the Sicilian campaign; sidelights and personal impressions from the day before the landing at Pachino to the break-through in the Mount Etna line at Aderno. To-day's story covers the first half of the 30-day campaign. The diary will be concluded to-morrow.

(By Ross Munro, Canadian Press War Correspondent)

July 9—We're somewhere in the Malta-Tripoli-Tunis triangle. At noon we rendezvous with the rest of the invasion fleet. Sight of this armada is unbelievable. Looks like some gigantic regatta without the gaiety. Grim grey patches of convoys on every side. Close in to us are hundreds of troopships and battleships, cruisers and other escort vessels weave among us. Fleets of tank-landing craft and cargo ships keep joining us from African ports. There's the American convoy abeam. Wonder when the air attack starts? What a target this is! Must try get some sleep. Sun sure is hot, but that's quite a wind kicking up whitecaps. Sea getting rougher than the devil. Malta Spitfire boys over us. Now we can see Malta. It's 50 miles to Pachino from here. Every one getting keyed up a little.

## Told Operation Is On

But they'll have to postpone the operation for a day or so until the weather is better. Landing craft couldn't live in this sea. Motor launch near us dodging through waves like a pocket submarine.

We get a big dinner at 7 p.m. and get kit ready. If we go on in this sea it will really show audacity of Allied commanders. I'd hate to have to make this decision. After darkness the sea settles down remarkably, but still heavy swell running. There's new moon in sky. Bombers droning over convoys—ours, I hope. Tracer slowly reaching into sky in direction of Sicily. There seems to be a searchlight ahead. We are told the operation definitely is on. Real cheery news despite the swell.

July 10: Soldiers shaking hands trying not to be too dramatic begin to file up to boats preparing to leave the mother ship. Can see reflection in the sky ahead—Pachino town blazing from R.A.F. incendiaries. So far so good. Bunch of us get into landing craft. In darkness some one kicks a smoke can off the stern and it begins to burn, flaring out a big flame. Hearts in mouths, now. Can they see it on shore? Sailors douse it. Davits creak and we hit sea. Boat leaps into air as if bombed; we are swept away from side of mother ship. Glad to see last of her. We lunge around in swell waiting for other craft to collect for run-in to shore. Usual confusion in the darkness and then we're away. Every one plenty silent trying not to be seasick or show nervousness. Dry taste in mouth.

Naval commander in boat ill three times. He was destroyer skipper before this. How can Ontario landlubber play in this league? There's some mixup about navigation. No, they got it sorted out. Hundreds of little boats around us all packed with guys with weapons ready. Warships firing now. Man alive, what a roar! Sheets of flame from guns lighting up sea. Coast is getting a shellacking. Bombers doing some work, too. Rolling thunder coming from land.

## Not Bad Except For Swell

If it wasn't for this terrible swell it wouldn't be too bad. Getting a little light on the horizon. There. You can see outline of low shore now. Hastings are over on our right and they are going in fast. Naval guns plastering headland there. High explosives crashing down.

Terrible concentration. Now getting dawn. Hastings boats touch down. R.C.R. all around us racing in last couple of hundred yards. First troops on the beach are going through the wire. There's some machine-gun fire. Shells are bursting in water all around us. Nobody hit. Our boat jolts on sandbar. Off we go. Some dunking. Typewriter floats on lifebelt I'd wrapped around it. Amazing hundreds of troops race across the beach. Craft pouring in. Still no enemy planes.

Firing on shore has ceased. Our boys are moving inland mopping up the bridgehead. They've gained it at little cost. I follow them up towards Pachino airfield. Sunburned already. Go back to beach. Most of my kit been lost in landing. Typewriter okay. Write first story and get it out to headquarters ship. For miles along the beach the ships are coming and going unloading our stuff.

I dig a good deep slit-trench on cliff by beach. Glad I didn't give that colonel the Italian spade I picked up. Grand sunset and enemy bombers come. Get good view from bottom of my trench. Flak from our ships looks mighty effective. Only a few planes dare dive through it. Couple of bombs fall near beach. Flares float down on little parachutes right over us. Every one firing at them trying to knock them out. Now the raids have stopped. They're after some shipping down the way.

## Snipers and Coffee

July 11—At 2 a.m. I start down to the beach to get aboard the headquarters ship and write detailed landing story. Some sniper lets go. Too close for comfort. I wriggle on my stomach for 100 yards. Okay now. Battleships firing to eastward and the blast of their guns from six miles out nearly knocks my hat off. Perhaps the Italian fleet is out. Just an idea. I write for five hours. Wish I could reward the steward who kept the black coffee coming. Finished now and back to the beaches.

I musta shocked the officers in the wardroom with beard and messy uniform. No time to wash this trip. Wander around beach trying to dig up some transport. Beach busy as boomtown. Stuff sure flooding in. I hoof inland to divisional headquarters which being set up. Get first sleep since Thursday night but flak wakes us up dozen times.

July 12: Infantry going hell-bent. Can't keep up with them until we get something on wheels. See Montgomery driving around in open desert car. See R.C.R.'s on the gun positions they'd captured near Pachino. Go into Pachino. Not much of a place. Canucks swarming all over southeast Sicily. All seems too easy. But they've got confidence now and going ahead fast. Get to British Corps headquarters.

July 13: Plenty weary, for this sleeping on open ground with a lone blanket is not what the book says. Flak bad again last night. Stuff has to fall somewhere and not comfortable under it. But this day starts great. Monty slept at corps headquarters too and I get first interview. He certainly treats Ca-

nadians well. Get same lift talking with Monty as you do talking with McNaughton. Visit Pachino airfield. Spits flying off it. Great job done by British airfield construction unit repairing it. Been ploughed up by Ities. Beginning catch up with out infantry for have vehicle now.

## Germans Ahead

July 14: Been through Ispica and on to Modica and with infantry again now. No big fight yet but they say it's coming. Germans ahead somewhere. Good to watch captured Italian general being taken to Simonds. Dust around here worst difficulty of all. Sunburn next. Flies, mosquitoes, ants, fleas follow. Lotta wrecked Italian stuff on the roads. Canucks sure been putting the blocks to them. I get tired just watching the prisoners walking wearily back.

July 15: Drive way back to Pachino airfield with copy. Spit pilots glad to take it to Malta. Envy them a bath in Valetta. They said they'd have a cool beer for me. I jeep away back to Vizzini which the 51st Highland Division now occupying. Mass of tanks and vehicles in the streets. British, Canucks and Yanks directing traffic. Prisoners sitting around on curbs.

July 16: Canadian divisional headquarters up road by Caltanissetta. Division just sets up shop under trees. Never been in building yet. Don't blame them for buildings mostly lousy, and that's literal. Hear we are heading for Enna dead in the centre of Sicily. Sleep in lemon grove where Germans were two nights ago. Every one showing signs of tiredness but every one still going flat out. These Italian towns most sinister spots to drive through at night. Snipers still active and you imagine there's a Hun on every little balcony. Difficult to know where our leading troops are for they move so quickly. Drove for an hour and a half last night on an open road without meeting a soul. Getting jumpy, thinking we are

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getting into German lines, when we hit a Canadian brigade.

July 17: Go up Enna road through Piazza Armerina. Bridge blown ahead. Walk over crater and watch some mortaring. Sappers working like slaves to get bridge fixed. Meet Simonds on road and he takes time out to tell us situation. Hopes to trap German battle group around Enna. Demolitions holding up Canadian advance for first time. Compo rations excellent. Our party learning campaigning ropes fast. We can stir up stew and tea now in half hour. Cooked noontime grub in roadside house occupied by two British paratroopers who'd strayed from their unit. They'd put up a sign, "Independent Airborne H.Q.," and were keeping hot tea ready for Canucks coming out of the line. Good fellows.

## Barrage At Enna

July 18: Big artillery barrage in battle before Enna. Infantry go in and clean up German hill positions. This Canadians' first big action. Can see Enna ahead. Canadians also swinging around on right to bag Valguarnera. Watched shelling from high point and it is like being at practice shoot at Lark Hill on Salisbury Plains. Perfect view whole battle. Infantry did magnificently. These lads have mighty zest for a fight. Germans can't understand it.

July 19: Talk with Carleton and York soldiers who'd taken hills yesterday. Mortar going down Valguarnera road and withdraw until it stops. Infantry don't seem to bother about mortaring unless it's practically bang on top of them. Life becoming very simple. I've been losing kit ever since landing and now there's practically nothing to worry about.

July 20.—Canucks moving up the

valley from Valguarnera to Leonforte. They still doing great. Watch attack from hill with Bren carrier crews. Pal in Hastings presented me with a big German infantry assault car which they'd captured. Drove to front in it but some trigger-keen gunners looked us over suspiciously. Will only travel in rear areas in it from now on.

July 21: Rumour that Canucks in Enna. Looks like phoney for Americans were moving on city fast from west. Hitch-hiked to Enna, finishing trip on mule, and found it full of Yanks. Only a small patrol of Canucks had gone in. Musta been fine city before war came.

July 22: Pats, Seaforths and Edmontons storming Leonforte. Get up around corner from town and talk with brigadier. He very pessimistic. Didn't know then exactly what going on in town. Felt he'd lost lotta men. Actually his battalions doing magnificent job without heavy loss. But fog of war snarls information up badly sometimes. Germans whanging away with mortars near brigadier but he just talked away quietly.

July 23: Lord Tweedamuir in bloodstained uniform and three-day beard on face related story of Hastings' thrilling assault on Assoro clifftop. We stood on peak as he told whole story. Seemed like fiction, so amazing.

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