

Veterans of Operations In Sicily Tell How Raid Caught Axis By Surprise

Naval Attack Aided Landing Forces to Drive Defenders Off Beaches in 90 Minutes— Six Sailors Arrive Home on Leave

An hour and a half after British naval forces opened their bombardment of the Sicilian coast, British and Canadians had driven up the beaches to silence the last shore battery and pill box, according to A.B. Harry Woof, son of Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Woof, 25 Chatham street, one of six local sailors who took part in the operations and who arrived home recently on leave. A.B. Woof, who said civilians in coastal areas were taken completely by surprise, was coxswain on one of the assault landing craft taking British 8th Army troops ashore.

Lieut. Scarlett Home

Lieut. William J. Scarlett, of this city, an officer in one of the flotillas, has returned home, and ratings in the party now on leave include: A.B. Edward L. Miller, 137 East avenue south; A.B. Arthur Howarth, 524 Ottawa street north, and A.B.'s Paul Brewer, William Lee and S. Tennant.

A few hundred yards from where A.B. Woof was landing the British troops a winery had been in operation. The civilians didn't start moving until they heard the ships' guns boom and saw troops stepping out on the beaches.

Employed at Renner's drug store before enlistment, A.B. Woof is a former sea cadet. He entered the naval service in July, 1940. For eight months in 1941 he served on a corvette doing escort duty in the North Atlantic, and while depth charges were dropped, nothing indicated a "definite kill" in the operations against U-boats.

In December, 1941, he volunteered

for combined operations training in the hope of seeing early action ashore. He was given leave to see his brother, Dyr. Bruce Woof, who had been injured in an accident in England and invalided home. He is now employed at the Dominion Foundries, plant, and is W.O.1 (physical training instructor) with the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps Lion here.

Brother There Too

Another brother, Pte. Thomas Joseph Woof, is with an ambulance unit of the 1st Division and took part in the Sicilian operation too.

His job is to test and help purify water supplies. He has been overseas since December, 1939.

After eight months' training in Great Britain, A.B. Woof was with a British flotilla during the invasion of North Africa. He was coxswain on his landing craft at Algiers, Sidi Feruch and Bougie. Ordered to Bougie by mistake, he was checked off as missing by his flotilla officer back at Algiers.

He was under fire at Bougie for ten days and ten nights, during which the ration was a cubic inch of corned beef, two hardtack biscuits and a quarter cup of tea for 24 hours. The situation at Bougie was that the Germans had retreated through it, taking off all supplies. German and Italian aircraft hammered the port with explosive and incendiary bombs.

Recalling his first few trips ashore as the Sicilian invasion got under way, A.B. Woof said there was some cannon fire and some random machine-gun bursts, soon quieted after the first assault troops raced up the beaches. He praised officers in charge of the landing craft units and the R.A.F. for its prior bombings and its cover on the day of the landing.

Another Hamiltonian with the flotilla was Petty Officer Ivan Rileu, who had been at Dieppe.

Highly-Trained Men

Halifax, Oct. 27. — (CP) — Their part played in the conquest of one continent and the groundwork laid for liberation of another, five Royal Canadian Navy officers and 49 ratings of one of the first Canadian landing craft flotillas to "touch

down" on Sicily's shores, arrived here recently on their way home for brief leaves.

The flotilla cut its fighting teeth in North Africa and some of the men were at Dieppe.

They had trained for weeks in mock operations off the English coast, then got their first chance when the invasion of North Africa began last November.

Back to England again they went, and took more training to correct their mistakes and polish their tactics.

For five days before the invasion they zig-zagged about the Mediterranean, one of about ten different convoys that shuttled back and forth keeping the enemy in the dark as to their eventual landing place. Only 12 hours before "zero hour" these convoys concentrated for the attack on their particular share of the landing front—off the southeastern tip of Sicily.

The morning of July 10, the small landing craft assault vessels were lowered and the troops silently scrambled into them, 30 to a craft. They waited an hour offshore, "the most nerve-racking time of all," as the sailors described it. Then they swept in, the first boats touching down at 2.45 a.m.

The instant they were detected the Italian defenders ashore raked them with murderous mortar fire that forced the initial flight to turn back on their first two attempts. Then they found a hole where the fire was lighter and roared in to shore at full throttle.

Was at Tiller

Coxswain Edward Miller, of Hamilton, was at the tiller of one of the craft that dodged through the hail of shrapnel to deliver its human cargo. He had to do "some fast ducking" to escape, Leading Stoker John Scambler of Winnipeg said, although Miller made light of it. Scambler told how Miller "kept steering his craft to the left, while mortar shells kept following him and plopping about four feet to his right." Finally he made a dash and hit the beach.

The flotilla landed the British troops on one side of a jutting point of land and the commandos dashed through the village of Marzamemi to secure beachheads behind it. On the other side of the point Canadian forces were landing and visible about the height of land were the barrage balloons swaying on their long cables about the invasion ships.

The first assault group of 90 men suffered only two casualties. One man was killed and one wounded, and met with only light opposition. Then the barges kept shuttling back and forth from the ship to shore, landing between 2,500 and 3,000 soldiers in ten hours.

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EUROPEAN
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ITALY
INVASION
SICILY
CANADA
ARMY
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