

JUL 10 1943

Long-Heralded Assault Starts; Paratroops Spearhead Big Push; Axis Rushing in Reinforcements

**Planes and Warships in Support as Attackers Battle Way Through
Barbed Wire and Gun Emplacements in Effort to Consolidate
Bridgeheads—Strike From Landing Barges By Night**

Allied Headquarters in North Africa, July 10. — (AP) — Allied armies invaded Sicily to-day and, with planes and warships in support, battled through coastal mine fields, barbed wire and gun emplacements in an effort to consolidate bridgeheads for the second European front. Canadian, British and American forces of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's command struck from landing barges by night, opening the big push they had awaited since they cleared North Africa of the Axis two months ago.

FINAL MASSIVE BLOWS OF AERIAL OFFENSIVE

Swarms of Allied bombers, fighter-bombers and fighters—engaged only yesterday in the final massive blows of an aerial offensive that had rocked Sicilian targets for weeks—roared across the Mediterranean narrows at dawn and formed an aerial umbrella for the fighting men aground.

(Axis broadcasts said the Allies, spearheaded by parachute units and strongly supported by sea and air, landed on both the southern and eastern coasts of the bomb-battered island which is a segment of metropolitan Italy. The Italian high command said "Axis armed forces are decisively counter-attacking."

Malta, Pantelleria Were Springboards

(A German dispatch implied that the invasion was mounted from Malta and Pantelleria, saying the heaviest of the Allied concentrations between Gibraltar and Cyprus had been observed at those islands in the Sicilian straits.)

The long-heralded battle of Europe was under way.

Naval bombardments covered the snub-nosed, shallow-draft landing vessels as they slipped from convoys a mile or more offshore and headed for the rocky, precipitous coast.

Through wire and hot machine-gun fire the Allied forces cut out their bridgeheads and then, with hardly a moment's pause, began battering their way toward the interior of the island.

Details of Invasion Are Expected Later

Official details of the first phase of the invasion were expected to be issued later.

Allied bombers, striking from Middle East bases by daylight yesterday, smashed the general headquarters and "nerve centre of Axis Sicilian defence forces" at Taormina, a Cairo communique announced.

Taormina lies on the Messina strait, which narrows northward to

separate Italy and Sicily by only two miles. The target area was declared "reduced to rubble and left in smoke and flame."

Hundreds of tons of explosives were dumped upon Axis strongholds in this attack and other final pre-invasion missions. The raiders said they believed many grounded aircraft were destroyed. Twenty Axis planes were shot down by Middle East and North African airmen. Eleven of the raiders failed to return.

Ten major air bases of Sicily are among the military prizes immediately at stake in the Allied invasion.

As many as 300 enemy aircraft once rose from these fields in a single day to dispute the Allied challenge for air domination, but continued raids trimmed that number considerably.

Catania, Anapo Plains Scene of Operations

(London quarters said the Italian communique's report that the landing parties struck at southern and eastern coasts suggested two zones of operation might be the large Catania plain and the Anapo plain.

(The Anapo plain lies southwest of Syracuse. The Catania plain centres about the port of the same name 40 miles off the toe of the Italian boot. It is one of the most favourable areas on the island, which is ridged from east to west

by mountains.

(The southern wing of the invasion may have to depend on beaches as supply inlets for a while, since the five best harbours—Trapani, Palermo, Messina, Catania and Syracuse—are all on the other coasts. Licata is suitable only for small vessels and Gela provides anchorage only.)

The Axis in the past has boasted of mobile reserves kept at central points to be hurled into any threatened breach in Hitler's "fortress of Europe." (A Reuters dispatch from North Africa said some Axis reinforcements were moved across Messina strait last night.)

Close friends say General Eisenhower has always considered an amphibious attack the toughest problem a general could face because the weather was added to all other uncertainties. But the weather in the western Mediterranean proved favourable.

Competent military strategists said that in an amphibious invasion the first three days—not the first three hours—are the critical period. The physical act of getting troops ashore is a lesser phase, they say, and the success or failure of the whole attempt really depends on deepening of bridgeheads so services of supply and air fields can be established behind the fighting men.

Soldiers Conscious of What Is Involved

Every Allied soldier who embarked for Sicily last night did so with the belief that the opening of the second front in Europe is the most important action in store for Allied arms.

Once Sicily could be occupied, the whole course of the war in the west might be altered to hasten the defeat of both Italy and Germany.

The Italians, for the first time since the first Great War, have been forced to fight on the soil of

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scheduled on "manoeuvres" to storm a beach at a vital point and help establish a bridgehead for the invading forces to follow up.

Nearly a year ago I vowed I would avoid assault units in the future. . . .

(Editor's note: Although Munro did not mention it in this dispatch, last August he was attached to a Canadian assault unit that went on the bloody beaches of Dieppe, and returned to Britain to write an eyewitness account of that battle that was published by newspapers all over the Allied world.)

. . . But here was a definite attachment which could not be altered without difficulties. Besides, it looked like a good spot to cover the landing, and when you get chances like that you get a "what-the-hell" feeling and hope your luck will stretch just this once more.

The next day I joined my unit.

Capt. Dave Maclellan, of Halifax, our P.R.O., and I determined to turn out a ship's newspaper on a

small printing press as soon as we left Britain.

Commander From Guelph Outlines Landing Plans

There were several conferences on board before departure, all officers attending, at which the commanding officers of the unit, who came from Guelph, Ont., and who is operational commander aboard the ship, outlined plans for practice landings.

For several days we lay off the British coast and at one stage went ashore for a brisk route march in rain storm. One practice landing was carried out in miserable weather.

Troops were soaked going ashore when they waded the last 50 yards or more, and it rained most of the day. But they were in high spirits and singing as they returned to the ships to dry out.

Infantry landing ships like the one we were aboard were anchored all around. In a slight mist obscuring the harbour most of the time you could not determine how many there were, for the line of ships extended far off into the distance.

Between practice landings and route marches there was plenty of time to lounge around and talk of what the future held.

Not a Soul on Ship Is Aware of Target

One's convictions swayed from belief that perhaps the whole thing would be cancelled — an awful thought—to speculation on the target. There was not a soul aboard our ship who knew the target, or even the area, with the possible exception of the colonel.

I heard it mentioned in all seri-

ousness that an attack on Singapore was a probability and also that this force would strike right at Japan with other co-ordinated task forces.

The Balkans were a favourite target for our cabin strategists and we considered a landing on the mainland of Italy, her Mediterranean islands, somewhere on the south coast of France, in Greece, or even a long voyage to attack the Japanese in Burma, or an operation out of India.

Then we thought of the northern coast of France and I would even recall a little of the Dieppe raid as we argued about the difficulties.

Infantry Assault Unit Considered Top Outfit

There is no best unit in the army, but the infantry assault force which I accompanied certainly is considered in the top bracket of infantry battalions.

The combined operations nature of this operation was emphasized aboard our infantry landing ship which had been in the original North Africa landings, with the skipper winning the Distinguished Service Cross for handling the ship with gallantry and skill east of Algiers during an intense bombing.

On the decks were Canadian and British soldiers in battle dress (their tropical uniforms were hidden in their packs), as well as naval ratings and some R.A.F. officers.

Along the sides of the ship were assault landing craft slung on special davits. It is these small craft, 40 feet long with a ten-foot beam, carrying 35 men in addition to a crew of four, which carry assault infantry to the shore.

The troops were stowing their packs, webbing and weapons in their own mess decks and experimenting with hammocks. The Canadians with whom I was travelling had been to sea a number of times on combined operations training and hammocks were no novelty to them. They handled them like sailors.

The British and Canadian troops were side by side in the mess decks and most officers were lucky enough to get cabins, four in each.

Meeting of All Officers Called on First Night

The first night aboard ship in port a meeting of all officers was called.

The majority were Canadians but there were some British officers too, Royal Navy officers in blue battle dress with "R.N. Commando" flashes and air force officers, as well as commanders of special service units, experts in combined operations.

A Dutch officer aboard the ship made a moving speech directed to the Canadians in which he spoke with emotion of the gratitude of the people of the Netherlands for the hospitality Canada had offered "our princess and her children."

Then he said: "I hope this operation will bring great glory to Canada, Holland and the Allied Nations."

Before the Canadians embarked

they had taken down their patches and "Canada" shoulder flashes. From appearance they might have been British troops. But when they shouted to girls on the streets of the towns through which they marched or made passing comments

to civilians they sounded pure Canadian.

Long Wait Before Sailing Eventually Becomes Tedious

We returned to port again for final preparations and to restock the ship with food, fuel and water. I had been in this port a number of times in the last few years and never had seen such a collection of shipping there.

The long wait before sailing eventually became tedious. Finally we were told we had just one day to get final letters written. These letters were taken ashore, censored and mailed when the expedition reached its destination. Every one aboard was permitted to write three letters concerned with private and personal matters.

The commander of the naval force came aboard to speak with the naval crews. He told them they would like going on the operation—he described it as a "raid"—and wished them luck.

A few days before leaving Lord Louis Mountbatten, chief of combined operations, said good-bye to the naval crews.

Lieut.-Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton commander of the Canadian overseas army, and Lieut.-Gen. H. D. G. Crerar, commander of a Canadian corps, visited a number of Canadian units.

Physical Training Periods Conducted Every Day

Among the Canadian units are field artillery regiments, an anti-aircraft regiment, an anti-tank regiment and service formations—Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps.

During the long wait before sailing we settled down to routine ship-board life. The men ate regular army food in the mess decks and there was beefing, as there usually is about army food. But the men seemed as happy as most troops. They played cards or shot dice.

Each morning the officers had them on the outer decks for physical training or lectures on a variety of military subjects, including weapons, platoon and company tactics, treatment of prisoners of war, field hygiene and medical practices.

Several evenings there were concerts put on by some of the men for the other troops. There was little chance for real boredom to set in.

The two war correspondents aboard were put to work. Peter Stursberg, of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, did a nightly radio broadcast over the ship's public address system of news heard from the B.B.C. in London. In addition Stursberg and this writer gave talks to the troops. I talked to them half a dozen times on the campaign in Tunisia.

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