

Tells of Grim Battling With Nazis at Ortona

In pointed contrast to Canadians who have spent the best part of four years in England and are still spoiling for a fight, there is Pte. Orville Bowman.

Boyish, still jumpy, Bowman came home from the wars this week-end, one of a large number of returning men who jammed two troop trains, one of which arrived Saturday night and the other in the bright dawn of Sunday morning.

Overseas less than 10 months, he'd probably seen more action than the other returning men combined.

Twenty-one-year-old Orville Bowman lived a lifetime in a single month. He fought in the Ortona campaign, shook off Jerry's incessant shelling, counter-attacking and even house-to-house fighting until a mortar shell caught up with him on New Year's Eve.

Tells About Ortona.

Fidgety, still hazy on detail, the stocky youngster from the Seaforth Highlanders, who lives at 332 Dufferin St., told about his month at Ortona where he seldom had his boots off, never removed his clothes. What sleep he got was fitful, never more than four hours at a stretch.

It was that way, he said, with every Canadian at Ortona.

Bowman wasn't bragging. What he had to say came only in answer to direct questions and always encompassed his company, not himself.

They fought a German paratroop battalion in Ortona after steady, relentless shelling from Jerry. In retreats, the Germans always left a suicide squad behind to slow the Allied advance.

"They'd snipe at us from houses until we located them, and when we'd clear one house, they'd run to another. You'd never know what was going on a hundred yards from you and you were always on the alert."

Was he nervous? "I never saw the guy who wasn't."

On guard at night, was he tightened up, tense? "Yah, we fired at anything. The slightest noise and we'd let go a burst. We never took chances."

Did he snipe from houses? "Sure, out the windows. Every time you saw a German you let go."

Did he get any of them personally? "Maybe, I don't know. If you do get one, you don't go out and look." He laughed.

Was he ever in the same house with the Nazis, rooting them out? "I don't think I was. Some of the guys said they were. I guess we all were at one time or another. Jerry was never very far away."

Christmas was something. Company by company, the Canadians came out of the front line 200 yards to a church where they had a quart of beer, a pack of cigarettes, a chocolate bar, roast beef and Christmas pudding.

"There was an old organ in the church. With shells whistling and mortars exploding outside, we sang carols. Then we went back to fight."

Bowman enlisted in August, 1942,

went overseas last May. He spent three months in England, three more months in North Africa, then pushed off for Naples. Ortona followed.

They'd chased the Germans to the outskirts of ruined, flattened Ortona when Orville got it. A mortar shell exploded and he was knocked down.

"It must have been close. I just saw a flash. I got up, dazed and deaf. The M.O. checked my ears later and . . . well . . . here I am." He still is hard of hearing, but he's better than he was, he says. His hearing is improving slowly.

Comrades Reunited.

Two boys who were in the same company with the 48th Highlanders in Sicily were reunited. L. Cpl. John Sandulak of Toronto, hit in the thigh in Sicily and returned home two months ago, was on hand to greet Pte. Freddie Temple of Belleville.

Temple went all through Sicily, had been a month in Italy when one dark night a truck hit him.

"I wakened up three days later in Africa. The Canadian doc put a plate in my head and fixed me up fine. I had a fractured skull and a concussion, and I don't know what all. I'm one of the lucky ones."

Two of the 37 returning officers were Col. D. D. Williamson of Brantford, former commanding officer of Canada's paratroops, and Major S. J. Deery of Toronto, attached to 1st Division headquarters in Italy. He was met by his wife and little son.

Two other Toronto officers were Lt. Rory Egan, who went through the Sicilian campaign, and Capt. Bruce Anderson, who said he'd spent three years in England waiting for the second front.

149
WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
ITALY
INVASION
CANADA
ARMY

Ortona