

PERTH REGIMENT HAS WEARY TASK CHASING BOCHES

(By Bill Boss, Canadian Press War Correspondent)

With the Canadian Corps in Italy, July 21.—(CP)—A pursuit battle is a tiring business. It's a different sort of warfare from storming a fortified feature such as the Hitler line and fighting a fierce, concentrated action.

It's a long drawn-out business; a severe endurance test—long days and weary nights of marching; constant shelling and mortaring from an elusive enemy; infrequent meals.

The Perth Regiment of Stratford, Ont., knows all about just how tough it can be and their record under such conditions is not matched anywhere in Italy.

Take Three Towns

The Perths began their pursuit battle after they crossed the Liri river east of Ceprano, ferrying across in relays an entire regiment in one assault craft, a feat not in keeping with military methods.

They took three towns, Ceprano, Pofi and Arnara, and except for four miles "foot-slogged" 35 miles in six days. And that's really marching in these rugged Italian hills.

The enemy retreated so fast there were few times the Canadians and Germans came to grips. But when they did fighting was grim and bitter.

There was stiff fighting, for instance, east of the Melfa river, on a bluff overlooking Ceprano. And in Ceprano itself, things were "thick." At Pofi, where the Germans had the road leading up to the town "taped," there was another "do" before Capt. W. J. (Sammy) Ridge, Millbrook, Ont., and his company entered the town.

Opposition Cleared

Casualties during the pursuit were not so very much lighter than those suffered by some regiments which broke the Adolf Hitler line.

Crossing the Melfa river on May 25, the battalion fanned out to the left of a Maritime Highland regiment, moved down the west bank of the river, struck inland and took up positions about three miles from

the day's fording place. The leading company, under Major J. E. Tipler, Fort Erie, Ont., lost three men when it ran into small arms and mortar fire. The opposition was cleared out, however, and a link-up effected with one Maritime regiment on the right and another on the left.

The next morning, supported by tanks of the 8th New Brunswick Hussars, a self-propelled battery from a Canadian field regiment, and a troop of engineers with bulldozers, the regiment advanced toward high ground on the east side of the Liri river overlooking Ceprano.

Seize Objective

The route took them north of the reservoir above San Giovanni. Lead companies under Major H. A. Snelgrove, St. Mary's, Ont., and Captain Ridge encountered heavy shelling from self-propelled 88mm. guns. The road was heavily mined, and infantry and tanks were separated until the engineers could sweep a path for the armour.

Mortars under Sgt. W. J. Hansford, Stratford, Ont., put down a smoke-screen and the infantry pushed forward.

Just south of the high ground, the battalion's objective, Major Tipler's company passed through the leading two and went on to seize the point.

Major Snelgrove's company had orders to make the first crossing and establish a bridgehead. Mounting tanks, the infantry made for the river bank the next morning amid heavy shelling. As the tanks approached the bank, the intensity of the enemy fire was so great the infantry was forced to dismount and sneak up on hands and knees.

The crossing of the Liri was made by the whole battalion in a solitary assault boat, each company using it in turns to ferry men across.

While Major Snelgrove's company headed for a right flank of the town, Capt. Ridge's men, after being ferried over, moved towards the town's outskirts. After a brisk fight the enemy retired to a hill overlooking Ceprano. Information obtained by Pte. Kostiga Cicalo, Montreal, however, showed a counter-attack imminent.

An artillery barrage was ordered, but a change in their axis of advance prevented the Perths from discovering for themselves the result of their shoot.

But a formal complaint the next day from a British division which had taken over their former area told them they had fared well. The English wanted to know why the Perths hadn't buried the 90 German dead or evacuated the 20 German wounded found above the town.

149
WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
ITALY
INVASION