

FIGHT RAGES IN CASSINO RUINS

Fanatical Nazi Gunners Creep Back Into Blasted Town.

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destruction of Cassino as the opening broadside in a concerted allied offensive all across the Italian front.

Official photographs showed that only a few jagged walls remained standing in Cassino today. The only building not demolished was a four-story hotel, the top two stories of which had been crushed by a direct bomb hit.

Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, commander of the Mediterranean air forces.

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'I Had Ringside Seat at the Far Edge of Hell' Says Eyewitness at Record Cassino Attack

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the air attack mounted. The sky was filled with the noise of engines and the deadly crash of bombs. Here came a wing of heavies, Flying Forts and Liberators. Almost on their tails more moved in, Mitchells, and Martin Marauders. P-38s and Thunderbolts flitted along their silent outskirts.

Artillery Starts

At noon the sharp bombing stopped, but that was just the signal for our artillery to begin. Battery after battery found its voice and spoke with deafening authority as steel shells whistled from our hillsides across the broad green plain to their mark.

In a jeep piloted by Pvt. Paul Latoski, Auburn, Mich., our party bounded behind a British lorry loaded with cabbages to an advance observation post in a hillside olive grove, 5000 yards as the crow flies—although no intelligent crowd would be seen in that vicinity today—from the target.

What we had was a ringside seat on the far edge of hell. It is quite possible that no battle in history—even back in Napoleon's time, when fighting was more compact and easier to see—was more clearly observed than the action at Cassino today.

As we fought our way to the front through heavy traffic, alternately through dust and mud the color and consistency of melted chocolate bars, bombers came in high behind us, settled down steady on the bomb run, dumped their loads and then swept off in wide arcs, first to the south and then to the north, making U-turns for home. Flak poked up at them feebly (it would not seem feeble on the receiving end, of course), seemingly from the southern corner of Cassino. If there was any fighter opposition it was not visible from where we watched the battle.

Key of German Line

From our clump of olive trees whose leaves shone like dusty silver in the sun, Cassino lay almost due west. It is the key point on this sector of the front and the Germans have held onto it almost with their fingernails against repeated attacks. Americans edged in from the northeast after bitter fighting and occupied approximately one-third of the place on Feb. 2, but the Germans stuck to the remainder of their positions. Just a month ago to the day, American heavies blitzed the abbey standing on top of Monte Cassino, 1500 feet above the town.

This was an attempt to drive the enemy from the monastery which they had unashamedly used as an observation post commanding a superlative view of the whole surrounding countryside. But they set up their observation posts in rubble and stayed on. Then the weather closed in. Today gave Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark's 5th army and Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker's air force the break they had been waiting grimly and patiently for.

As the communiqué revealed today, operations called for a "large-scale air effort" for 3½ hours against Cassino proper as part of a co-ordinated plan, with ground forces whose artillery, both British and American, took up the pounding of the German positions at noon. Then the infantry, supported by tanks, pressed forward, exerting "maximum pressure" on the foe.

Smoke Gushes Skyward

That is how it looked on paper. Here is how it unfolded before our eyes:

Smoke gushed skyward from the first bombs of those Mitchells in great gray blossoms, temporarily smudging the view of snow-capped Monte Cairo, rising 5100 feet in the northwest background. That gray was an ugly deathly color, resembling nothing so much as liquid squid squirts in a marine battle. Explosions lashed up through the smoke like flaming swords. Then channeled by bleak stony mountains on both south and north, the sound of the blast hit us as if some giant, standing astride the town, had scooped the noise up in his bare hands and pitched it back across the valley.

Starting at 10 o'clock I counted nearly 200 bombers in 20 minutes, bearing toward the target, with vapor trails streaming behind. Visibility, which was crystal clear at first, was becoming hazy now. A group of B-17s came in and geysers lept perpendicularly around the railroad station. Behind it on the south edge of Monastery hill, you could see the Rapido valley stretching, a peaceful picture with a clean cumulus cloud floating high above. That scene will change soon enough when the ground fight gets rolling that way.

At 11:46 a pack of Marauders rode in high. It looked as if they had the target on a hairline. Now smoke was beginning to crawl up that desolate jagged hill toward the monastery itself and the whole area was covered with grime as if somebody had dumped a cement factory on it.

Nazi Artillery Answers

German artillery started up and planted white plumes along highway 6, winding out below us toward Cassino. Their fire just then was brief.

Through the battle thus far had stood La Rocca, a ruined castle on a rock jutting out from the north side of the main monastery hill and itself an observation post. Suddenly it was drenched with black smoke and flame.

The weather began to clear again as a warm breeze brushed the clouds away. Chaiky lines of buildings lay under a maelstrom of explosions in the center of the town.

Back of the station highway 6 emerged again, rolling on into the Aurnel mountains. German traffic moves east toward the front on that side. Allied traffic moves west toward the front on ours, over the same road.

At 12 o'clock the air attack finished. Headquarters announced that it was the heaviest load of bombs—perhaps more than

1400 tons—ever unloaded on one square mile of earth in a tactical air raid.

Throbbing Drum of Sound

But now the whole world became a throbbing drum of sound. Our artillery barrage began. "To make those Krauts keep their heads down and allow our infantry units and tanks to move in," one officer said.

Only the Dead Sleep

You wonder fleetingly what sort of ungodly bedlam the center of Cassino is like, how the Hunns are taking it. There will be no easy sleep for the men camped out on the hillside and in the gullies of this sector tonight. No easy sleep except for the man who fell today.

Now, without any particular reason there flashes to your mind a brand new white signboard, painted with red letters which you saw on a building en route to the front. It said in English, "Catholic mass Sunday and Wednesday, 6:30 p. m."

You have to stand with your mouth open like a fish to let your eardrums do a little compensation action. Through the din William F. McDermott, of the Cleveland

Plain Dealer, shouts and it comes like a whisper. "I always thought Hollywood overdid this sort of thing."

Ahead, the observation plane dives into a towering fountain of smoke. "That's ours, isn't it?" somebody asks. "We hope," somebody else replies.

Now the artillery dwindles and infantry and tanks are on the move. We cannot tell the outcome of the action. We cannot see more from here. This story is just one fragment in a crazy, stirring mosaic of war.

On the short way back from our olive grove, while the guns are still going strong, you see units ridiculous playing volleyball. An Italian girl in a red blouse steps carefully through the ruins of the road, balancing a wicker basket of laundry on her head. Over the edge of the hill an Italian peasant is spading his garden.

Back at headquarters a fresh sign on the bulletin board says that tonight's movie is "Lady Takes a Chance," with Jean Arthur.

ELLIOTT ROOSEVELT'S WIFE ASKS DIVORCE

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Roosevelt was agreeable to Roosevelt visiting the children at all reasonable times and hours.

Mrs. Roosevelt's attorney, Robert K. Hanger, said that he would send Col. Roosevelt's waiver of contest papers for his signature.

The petition charged "the defendant, disregarding the solemnity of his marriage vow and his obligation to treat the plaintiff with kindness and attention, about a year prior to their said separation, commenced a course of unkind, harsh and tyrannical conduct toward the plaintiff which continued with very slight intermission until the plaintiff finally separated from the defendant on or about Oct. 1, 1943."

Visited Family in August.

Col. Roosevelt last visited his Dutch Branch home near Ft. Worth last August, while on leave from the National African theater.

Mrs. Roosevelt declined to make a statement, referring all inquiries to Hanger.

Texas law provides a divorce suit must be on file 30 days before any

final court action can be taken, Hanger explained.

The Roosevelts were married 11 years ago, just five days after Elliott's first wife, the former Elizabeth Browning Donner, daughter of a Philadelphia steel magnate, obtained her final divorce decree in Reno.

Call Him Individualistic

Roosevelt's first marriage lasted only 18 months and at the time of the divorce the couple had an 8-months-old son.

Elliott, described as the most individualistic of the President's sons, was an advertising executive and owned and operated a large ranch in Texas. Prior to his entrance into the army shortly after the outbreak of the war, he had served as vice president of an airline, aviation editor for a newspaper chain and also had organized a chain of radio stations in the Southwest.

The Roosevelts have three children, Chandler, 8; Anthony, 7, and David, 2.

WALES STRIKERS RETURN

CARDIFF, Wales, March 16 (U. P.)—Adm. Chester W. Nimitz and Lt. Gen. Robert C. Richardson Jr., commander of the Hawaiian department, were back at their Pacific headquarters today following a series of conferences at Washington.

COL. ROOSEVELT'S WIFE ASKS DIVORCE

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