

ONE ROAD TO ROME

The lieutenant shook Dixon and said: " Our no-fire line cuts right through the middle of Rome. Looks like we'll go in today." Dixon called over, speaking softly, so as not to disturb the dozen or so tired officers sprawled on cots that almost filled the floor of the schoolroom.

"Hotch," he said, "are you awake?"

I said

~~XX~~

"Yes, and let's get going. Wake Cook."

Cook spoke up in the dark a few cots away: "I heard and I'm half-dressed already. Goddam these leggings. What time is it?" It was 4:30 a.m. and the day was Sunday, June 4, 1944.

We lit two candles and by their light dressed, packed our musette bags, and rolled up our bedding. We moved automatically and swiftly. We had done the same things over and over, day after day, for so long that our fingers were often ahead of our drowsy heads in tying and lacing and strapping the light gear that contained everything needed to live at the front.

"Looks like this is it at last," I said. ~~Nixon said,~~

Dixon said, "I sure for God's sake hope so."

Cook said, "I don't think I have these goddam leggings laced right."

The three of us had attached ourselves to the 36th Infantry Division when the final push from the Anzio beachhead began and had stayed with it right on through - Ken Dixon, of the Associated Press; E.Z. (Zeke) Cook, of Newsweek, and myself, a public relations officer.

There was a fourth newspaperman in our little group - Wick Fowler of the Dallas Morning News, who had covered the 36th - a Texas outfit - for months and who now was sweating out, like the rest of us, the high-spot of the entire war in the Mediterranean - the fall of Rome, 20 air-line miles away. We didn't wake Wick. He had arranged to go along with the commanding general - Fred L. Walker, of Columbus, Ohio,

We were bivouaced on a hillside in a Fascist schoolhouse, the division's CP for the moment and a Jerry CP only two days before. Behind and below us, four miles or so, was Velletri, still in the mop-up stage, as also were the thick woods around us. Nine snipers had been captured a scant hundred yards from camp on the previous afternoon and last night at supper Jerry had shelled us out of our mess tent and pinned us for hours in the deep, safe dugouts his retreating comrades had left so hurriedly.

As we piled our gear out front in the half-light of approaching dawn, Dixon said, "I'll check G-3 and see what's what." I said I'd load the jeep. Cook said he would see about some chow. The cooks were already up and busy.

We all met a few minutes later in the cooktent, where the cooks had gasoline fires roaring under big marmite cans of coffee and cereal and were slicing bread and soaking dried eggs for breakfast. Between sips of scalding coffee and bites of bread and jam, we laid our plans. G-3 had told Dixon that Col. George E. Lynch, of New York, commanding the 142 Infantry, would head up a special reconnaissance party, composed of men from his own outfit, with attached armor. This party would spearhead the advance. ~~THE PARTY WAS~~ It was being made

ahead and we could pick it up along the road.

Prospects were good, said G-3, that we would make it into Rome by afternoon. Intelligence reports said Jerry was pulling out to the north and east and nothing more than small pockets of resistance were expected. Our own artillery had been ordered to cease firing for fear of hitting our own rapidly-advancing troops and, as the lieutenant had said, the 'no-fire' line - the line ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ in front of which our cannon could not shoot^o - ran straight through the center of Rome from east to west. It looked like a cinch.

One of the cooks said, "How about rations?"

"We'll take some Ks. We'll be with the rekky boys and they'll have enough."

"Better take some cigarettes," another cook~~E~~ said. "Them Romans will beg 'em fast, just like they did in Naples. There's plenty of those goddam (and he named two of the weird new brands that have found their way overseas) nobody ever smokes 'em."

We loaded up with a carton each and our rations and went down to the dismount line where "Jim & Josie", our jeep, was parked. Dixon and I sat in front and Cook climbed in behind, sandwiched between the fat bedrolls.

"I like this," he said, "these will stop the small pieces anyhow. You guys are naked."

Dixon said, " We probably won't get anything. The krauts are on the run. Listen, you can't hear a sound now."

And it was true. For the first time in many days, the roar of guns and crump of shells had stopped. Maybe it would be a picnic after all.

The jeep bucked over the rutted forest path, over the ditch and out on the main road, which twists along the side of the Alban Hills toward Rocca di Papa on the east side of Lake Albano and thence winds west to Rome. There was not much traffic and most of what there was was coming towards us - messenger jeeps and ambulances for the most part. It was a grand morning, cool and promise of a cloudless sky. Ground mist lay in the valley, but we knew the rising sun would burn that off by nine o'clock. X "Jim & Josie" purred along smoothly, as if she knew it was to be a great day. She was an old campaigner, this jeep. Brought from Africa by Major Luther J. Reid, of the Army Service Forces, many months ago and christened by him for his children. Now Major Reid had gone home and I had taken her over to carry on his work. She had seen a lot of war - Cassino, San Pietro, Trocchio, Castelforte, Minturno, and all the rest of the battered towns that scar the smiling countryside between Naples and the front.

The road was hard-surfaced, but not smooth. Heavy German traffic had pounded deep potholes ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ and shells had ~~XXXX~~ ripped ~~XXXXXXXX~~ and gouged the surface. Wrecked and abandoned equipment lay in the ditches on either side - ammo boxes, shell cases, helmets, blasted wagons and trailers. Swollen carcasses of mules and horses sprawled stiff-legged where they had fallen and we drove around them carefully, afraid of mines. There ~~was~~ ^{were} dead men in the ditches, ~~XXXXXXXX~~ too - Germans - and from the smell, there were more in the ~~XXXXXX~~ woods. It was all familiar - we had been traveling roads like this for a long while. The wreckage, ruin, and stink had a sameness no matter what the road - only the terrain changed.

~~We hadn't gone more than a mile and a half from our starting~~

point when we spotted an American jeep by the roadside. On the ground nearby lay two blanketed forms and from their shoes they were Americans.

Dixon said, "That must be Lt. Col. X and his driver. The collecting company told me he was up here and they're coming up to get him."

The colonel had been out on a lone reconnaissance the evening before and had been ~~ambushed and~~ shot to death, along with his driver, by a Jerry machine gunner concealed in the woods. We had known him well and ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Cook expressed what was in all our minds: "Poor guys, they won't get to see Rome;"

We had gone several miles and were close to Rocca di Pappa, when we saw the first evidence of recent fighting. With its big gun pointing blindly into the woods and its carcass slewed catty-cornered across the road, sat a wrecked Sherman tank - an M 7. On the near side close beside the treads were several large hunks of greasy, blackened meat, still smoldering. They were all that was left of men, but how many could not be told. As we passed slowly around the charred ^{and smoking} hulk, we saw on the other side another man. He was in one piece - stark naked and hairless, lying face down with arms stretched stiffly out beyond his head. His entire head and body were burned a dirty red, ~~his head with~~ splashed with black. He looked like a huge and horrible doll~~X~~. Some GIs were sitting by the roadside and one of them said the 'doll' had been a major. The tank had been hit some hours before and no one had escaped~~X~~.

~~It was a nasty sight and, though no one said it, was~~

~~It was a ghastly sight and a grim reminder that the road to~~

~~Rome was not a flower-strewn path, but a place of carnage and ruin.~~

A jeep came toward us and the driver flagged us down and said: "The road's blown around the next bend. You can't get through 'till the engineers fill it in. I'm going back and guide them up."

We rounded the curve, slowed down, and pulled up to join a half-dozen jeeps and a light tank on the side. Ahead, the road was blasted for a span of about 20 feet. The crater was some 15 feet ~~wide~~ deep and wider than the road. Its sides were steep; too steep for even a jeep to negotiate in low, low gear. Jerry had done one of his better demolition jobs.

"There's another one, even bigger, around the next curve," volunteered the GI tank driver. "Guess we'll be here for a while."

More traffic piled up. Four jeeps full of medics and litters arrived and the sergeant in charge surveyed the damage and cursed. He said they had come ~~up~~ to pick up some wounded reportedly on the hill above us. There was a jeep trail up to its summit according to the map, but the start of the trail lay up beyond the craters. Now they would have to walk all the way and carry the casualties back. First, he added, they would have to find their customers.

"Shorty and Looie," he said, "you two go up and have a look" and he waved his arm up the hill.

"Shall we take a litter?" said Shorty.

"Sure you'll take a ~~litter~~ litter. What the hell do you think you're going up there for - a clambake?"

"Alright, alright," said Looie, ~~let's go~~ "let's go, Shorty."

And they strode up through the trees, the white-circled red crosses on the backs of their helmets gleaming fainter and fainter until they were out of sight. The sergeant and the rest of his men joined the others sitting by the roadside. Only the machine gunners stayed in the vehicles, keeping eyes and ears open for Jerry.

Looking downhill and across ~~Lake Albano~~ the narrow valley, we could see Lake Albano and beyond the lake a town, Albano, according to the map. It was about a mile over to the town and Jerry had started throwing in heavy stuff, probably 170s, along the road to the south. In the town ~~itself~~ itself, street fighting was in progress. Grenades and bazooka rockets made dull, small explosions. We could hear quite plainly the b-r-r-r-p, b-r-r-rp of Jerry's zipper guns and the slower pup-pup-pup-pup of our own Tommy guns and BARs. Now and then a kraut shell would fall in the ~~lake~~ lake and a beautiful white column would rise high out of the blue-green water, hover an instant, and fall. It was pretty to watch - from a distance.

Cook said, "If it weren't so hazy, I'll bet we could see Rome from here."

We agreed and tried to imagine that we could, but we couldn't. Two six-by-sixes lumbered up and stopped and about 50 GI combat engineers jumped down. Their Garands and carbines were slung across their backs and in their hands they carried shovels, picks, and axes. They didn't talk or stand around looking. They pitched right into their job. The pick and shovel men started filling in the hole, while the axemen swung up the slope and began to fell small trees to buttress the downhill side of the crater.

They worked fast and silently and with an efficiency that told of many, many similar jobs.

Down the road from Rocca di Papa came a string of Italians--old men and old women, young girls and boys. They all had empty sacks and baskets and the tank driver said they were going down to loot a Jerry ration dump in the woods below. There had been another lot just before we drove up and they said they had not eaten for three days. Some of the men watched the engineers work for a while and then, rather hesitantly, began to throw rocks into the crater.

"Atta boy," said one of the sweating engineers, "every little bit helps."

The Gyties grinned and worked more boldly. Soon they took off their coats and began to tote and heave in earnest. Roaring up the road like a pair of heavy tanks came a bulldozer and caterpillar tractor. A lieutenant came with the two machines. He recognized our trio and we talked. He said this hole would take about a half-hour and, from what he had heard, the other one a bit longer. He went on to see the second crater and the 'dozer and 'cat' swung into action. They worked as a team. The 'dozer charged obliquely into the bank, gouging out huge chunks of earth and roots and rocks with its wide, sharp blade. Then it bucked the pile down to the busy 'cat', which drove in from the side, scraped the fill from the 'dozer's blade, and shoved it into the crater.

The machines made plenty of noise and one of the GIs said,

"If Jerry starts laying them in here, we'll never hear them 'till they bust - and that's too late."

Everybody nodded in agreement and another GI recalled that the dirt movers' drivers had to work with that noise all the time and never could hear a shell winging in. He added he wouldn't want that job - he was a machine gunner - and the others nodded again.

The engineer lieutenant came back from his inspection of the second hole and ordered all traffic to stay put until both craters were filled. He explained to us that there was no use of everyone pulling ahead for so short a distance and then piling up again.

~~XXXXXXXX~~ His first guess on time proved accurate and in just an hour from the time the engineers began their repairs, we rolled across the erstwhile holes and on toward Rome.

Rocca di Papa is just one more Italian hilltown - small, sunny, and dirty. It had not been damaged badly; some ~~A~~ shelled buildings, but not to be compared with Cisterna or Velletri. In a small and dusty piazza, surrounded by his officers and vehicles, we found Col. Lynch, commander of the rekky party. He knew us and grinned his greetings through grime and black stubble. Looking at him, we saw ourselves - dirty, unshaven, but elated. Next stop - Rome.

We told him that we would like to join his party and he said, "Sure. Glad to have you. You can follow my command car. We'll move out as soon as the trucks come up to carry the infantry."

Foot soldiers were slogging through the town in endless lines. They were bewhiskered, bleary-eyed, and tired. Fight all day, march all night; fight all night, march all day; eat while you walk - C rations, D rations, K rations - they all taste lousy after a while.

Quite a few had flowers on their helmets or stuck in their rifle barrels. Many had Jerry souvenirs - Lugers, binoculars. One tall, somber doughfoot had a black sealskin coat slung over the top of his pack.

The colonel was stopping all vehicles. Hisrekky party had priority and must go first and, goddam it, he was going to see to that. Lots of miscellaneous traffic rolled up and he pulled them off to the side and told them to wait.

"Been lucky so far," he said, in an aside to us, "So far, I've outranked every s.o.b. that's come along. Hope we shove off soon. There's bound to be a 'one star' sooner or later. "

From time to time, he dictated messages to the radio operator in his command car, operational messages. Once he had the operator call: "X-Ray calling Lobster. X-Ray calling Lobster." And Lobster came in in a adenoidal crackling voice, and told X-Ray to go ahead. "Here is the message," X-Ray said, reading the ~~XXXXXXXX~~ colonel's words, "Urgently request strong air cover for my column. Repeat: Urgently request strong air cover for my column. Over;" And Lobster said, "OK, X-Ray, message received. Over"

"Second time I've asked for planes," the colonel said, "Good God, what a couple of MEs couldn't do to us. All these goddam fools think about is running into Rome. They forget about the krauts and, if I know them, we'll have some trouble before this day is out."

Out on each flank of the town, mop-up squads were digging out snipers and bursts of BAR and Tommy gun fire rippled down into the square. A GI came down the street with three Jerries, hands clasped behind their

heads and their eyes downcast. Italian villagers spit at them and the GI told them to get the hell out of There. The guard halted his prisoners in the courtyard of a building and a German-speaking non com began to question them, noting their answers on a large ruled pad which he fished from a map case. We walked over and listened. The non-com said, "They were hiding in a cave and the Pyties tipped us off. They say their buddies pulled out last night, but they decided to get captured. They say that unless we keep shoving ahead, their division will stop and fight."

The oldest of the trio, who seemed to sense the non-com's words, nodded vigorously in agreement. Their clothes were worn and dirty and non-descript. One had a whole uniform of field gray and a khaki cap. The others had field gray tunics and khaki caps and trousers. Their boots were in bad shape, cracked and very old. After a while, the non-com said he was through with them and the guard led them away.

As we turned to go back to our jeep, the trucks arrived with the infantry. The colonel barked a few last orders, climbed in his command car and signaled us to follow. Off once more. Our progress was sporadic. Sometimes we whirled along at a dusty 20 miles an hour, and at other times crawled. The colonel set the pace in keeping with flank movements by other units as reported by radio. Once we were held up for 20 minutes by a Jerry self-propelled gun which was throwing air-bursts over a road junction just ahead.

"We can expect that sort of thing all day," the colonel said, "That guy will just roll along with us, laying down harassing fire."

Noon was upon us as we rolled into a small town boasting a large sign: "Roma. 11 km " --eight miles to go and nine hours of daylight left to do it in; a cinch.

The column pulled up for a break and we opened a can of pork and beef paste, fished out of a K ration. I started to share it, using a jack knife blade to carve and serve. Several villagers stood around watching hungrily. ~~THEN~~ I scooped out a hunk of the mixture and slapped it on a biscuit. Cook reached for it, but missed, and the meat fell off in the dirt. An elderly man, fairly well-dressed, darted forward and picked up the morsel.

"Non buono, sporco," I said, pointing to the dirt which clung to the sticky paste.

He smiled and took out a small pocketknife and scraped most of the dirt off. "Bono," he said, as he popped it in his mouth. We gave him ~~him~~ two biscuits and some chocolate; he looked like he needed ^{them} ~~it~~ more than we did.

In words and gestures, he indicated that I had need of a shave. I agreed, not having touched a razor for three days. He said good, he would shave me right in the jeep and straightaway sent a young boy down the street for his shaving stuff.

"Well," I boasted to Zeke and Ken, "youse mugs will enter Rome this sunny Sunday looking like a couple of bums, while I, clean and dapper, will typify the young and dashing American."

"Nuts," they said in unison, to which Cook added, "you'll look like a goddam base soldier. They'll think you flew up."

The lad was returning with the shaving stuff and I was trying

to find out from my barber which seat in the jeep would be best for the operation, when the colonel yelled, "Let's go!" —and we did, me with my whiskers, waving good by to a puzzled and chagrined Italian.

"And how is clean and depper Hotchkiss?" asked Dixon. I said, "Nuts."

Once out of the village we could see Rome in the distance. Not distinctly, but in the mass — white and gray and big, filling the horizon.

We couldn't miss now. A few miles more and we began to pass the familiar evidences of a metropolis. Urban-type dwellings, frequent road junctions, power stations, fuel oil storage yards. Our spirits rose higher and higher. We were only two kilometers out and it was not yet two o'clock. We would eat supper in the Eternal City without fail.

Already we were passing Mussolini's attempt at Hollywood — grandiose modernistic movie studios. The largest of the studio buildings had a tremendous sign painted on the roof, red letters on a white background.

"P O W" it said. It was a German prison camp and the sign was meant to keep our planes from bombing their own men. The prison looked empty, but we didn't stop to look. We were rolling into Rome, by God.

It happened so quickly that they could have gotten us all if they had kept on shooting. B-r-r-r-p, b-r-r-r-p, b-r-r-r-p — Jerries and from the sound of the bursts, very close. The colonel's car jammed to a halt and its occupants leaped out, crouching behind the steel disk wheels of their vehicle. I slammed on my brakes, threw the jeep in reverse, and tried to back up to the lee side of the armored rekky car behind me.

But he was turning out, the better to bring his guns to bear on the enemy and I couldn't make it. I jerked forward and to the right and ~~skipped~~

INSERT "A"

~~When~~ Past the studios on both sides of the road were wheat fields and just ahead, a small suburb - Quadraro, I later learned. The field to the right was sunken from just beyond the road's edge to a depth of about 50 yards. The sink sloped down away from the road and ~~where it stopped~~ at its end the land rose sharply in a red clay bank. Dug along in the face of the bank ~~where~~ was a series of small caves. ~~Beyond the bank, the field was up to the height of the road and~~ Behind this bank, the field was at road level and at its rearmost boundaries were several ~~small~~ buildings, one a massive and ancient pile with a square castellated tower.

yelled, "Hit the ditch, boys."

There was no response. I was alone in the jeep.

"It's nice down here," a voice said. It was Cook with Dixon alongside him down in the ditch, which was wide and deep and floored with grass. Two single shots cracked overhead and a combination vault and tumble rolled me into the ditch with the other two.

"How the hell did you guys leave the jeep and get down here so fast?" I asked.

"Brother, don't ask us," said Dixon. "All I remember is nothing."

We were not ~~alone~~ alone. The driver of the command car was beside us and several other GIs. ~~XXXXX~~ ~~XXXXX~~ Up on the road the colonel was yelling orders. Two armored reconnaissance cars, including the one I had unsuccessfully tried to use as a screen, lumbered across the ditch and moved slowly out into the field. A third went further down the road ~~XXI~~ then, too, turned out across the field toward the towered building. All three cars moved cautiously; there might be mines. Jerry had stopped ~~XXXXX~~ shooting, and the rekky cars were trying to guess where the shots had come from. The car on the right opened up with its heavy machine gun and raked the mouths of the small caves. Clouds of red dust obscured the openings as the bullets cracked into the hard clay. The center car began to traverse the wheat with a light machine gun, back and forth, slowly but thoroughly. On the left, the ~~XXXXXX~~ 37 mm cannon on the third car sent shell after shell crashing into the big square tower.

About 200 yards out in front of our jeep, between the two machine-gunning rekkies, a German rose ~~out of~~ ^{out of} the wheat. He had been

hit. He stood erect for a long second, motionless, and then fell forward on his face. The wheat tops waved erratically as he ~~knocked~~ thrashed about.

It was as if he had touched off a signal. His comrades opened fire in earnest. Machine guns, machine pistols, and rifles ripped and crackled and our answering fire grew to a steady roar. And now new enemies appeared on our left, where the level of the wheat field was above the road - heavy automatic fire. We were attacked from two sides.

"Here come the tanks," said Dixon, and we rose to our knees for a ~~look~~ better look. They were moving down the left side ~~XXXXXX~~ of the road, passing our stalled column. ~~XXMAJORXX~~ Their turrets were down and a major was running ahead of them, pumping his arm up and down - the army signal for double-time. He reached a point just beyond us and halted, pointing out in the fields with one arm and ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ pumping the double-quick signal with the other.

One by one, the big, noisy giants roared up to him, spun right, and lurched off into the sunken field. After five had gone in, the major trotted across the road and pumped and pointed to the left, where Jerry's fire seemed to be growing in intensity.

Behind the tanks came the truckloads of infantry. Three, at the colonel's command, continued through the crossfire and on toward Quadraro. The others halted and disgorged the men, who quickly filled the ditches on both sides. We three closed in to make more room. These were veteran troops - they had seen Paestum, ~~XXXXXX~~ Salerno, and Cassino. Some had survived the bloody Rapido crossing. They were calm and matter-of-fact and lost no time taking advantage of good cover to be comfort-

able. They smoked and talked. One said the sergeant had been given five gallons of wine in the last village; another said a guy in "B" company had seven Lugers. A few knelt and peered over the edge of the ditch to see if they could spot Jerry's location.

The sun was warm and pleasant.

The ditch was quite comfortable. We sat on its grassy floor with our backs against one side and our legs stretched up the opposite slope. We talked the situation over. It was, we agreed, some isolated force of krauts, left behind to harass and delay. We'd be on our way soon. But we weren't. At orders from the road the GIs in our ditch climbed out and ~~emptied~~ spread out, crouching low and moving in a stooped trot toward the caves and the fields beyond. The ditches across the road also emptied and the GIs scrambled up the ^{left} bank and were immediately lost to sight in the wheat as they advanced ~~AM~~ toward the ^{hidden} enemy. ~~XXXX~~

~~XXXX~~ Above the crackle of small arms ~~XXXX~~ came the whine of a shell. It would be close; it was - in the field across the road. Small, high-velocity stuff - an anti-tank shell. More came over in rapid succession; then some 88s. We were flat in the ditch now, noses pressed in the dirt, studying at close range the insect life of central Italy. A panting GI jumped into the ditch.

"There's a medico," he said.

"Saw two in the ditch across the road," Dixon said, and the GI left, crouched low and running.

There were medicos out in the field, too, and soon they began to return with laden litters. ~~XXXX~~ They set up their aid station right above us on the road. One of them ran to the stretcher-~~XXXX~~

bearing jeep that had brought them.

"I'm going back for the ambulance," he yelled, and drove off. Another red cross jeep pulled up and two medical officers jumped out and ran to the growing line of wounded. They took the worst hit first. One lad had been shot through the groin by an anti-tank shell, which passed right through without exploding. The hole was large and ragged and in the back, half his buttock was torn away. He was bleeding profusely and was semi-conscious. Both medics worked on him - one on the wound; the other with hypos and plasma. One, two, three - three bottles of plasma drained into his body before they lifted him into the ambulance, which had arrived almost as soon as the doctors.

I asked the doctor, a major, if the boy would live.

"He's pretty sick, but ~~XX~~ I think he'll make it alright," the major said.

Another ambulance replaced the first and was quickly loaded. Then a third, and a fourth. In all, ¹⁵~~XX~~ wounded men were evacuated from our position. The dead were left in the fields for the moment.

On both flanks, things had quieted down. Fire on the right had virtually ceased. On the left, it continued heavy, but much further distant. Up ahead, the ~~Guadraro~~ road junction was being shelled heavily with ~~XXXX~~ air-bursts and we could hear small arms fire, too.

Soon the men on the right began to come back. They had lost contact with the enemy and were drawing no further fire. The tanks pulled out of the right-hand field, crossed the road, and ambled off to join their fellows on the left. The rekky cars pulled back on

road and took their places in the column.

We stayed in the ditch. Going into the third hour, ~~XXXXXX~~ we began to be restless. We were cramped and itchy. There were many ants and tiny red lice in the grass and they had begun to explore our bodies, via our sleeves or open collars. We had not seen Col. Lynch for some time, although his command car was still there. The rekky cars moved on toward the junction, followed by several jeeps and we felt quite alone. It was almost 4 o'clock.

Someone suggested that we push on to ~~the~~ Quadraro and look for the colonel. Good idea. Without any lost motion, we popped out of the ditch, vaulted into Jim & Josie and, with that peculiar feeling of nakedness that comes to anyone under direct enemy observation, ~~we~~ made off at high speed. It was a long half-mile and we sat with our shoulders hunched against our helmets in low silhouette, waiting for the first burst or bullet. But nothing happened and we pulled up behind the walls of the buildings at the junction in the midst of the infantry ^{men} and their trucks.

Colonel Lynch and a group of officers were standing at the junction corner, studying detailed maps of Rome. We were, at this point, exactly one kilometer from ^{the city limits.} ~~Rome~~. From time to time, more officers and men would arrive, units from behind were catching up. Several companies from the 141st and 143rd Infantry Regiments were coming in and also some elements from a reconnaissance group of another division that had been working further east. Artillery officers joined our party, for their 105s were close behind, ~~we~~ moving into positions back where the skirmish had taken place.

Promptly at 5 o'clock, hot food arrived, tightly sealed in marmite cans wedged in the back of a jeep. It had been prepared miles back in the rolling kitchens and rushed up steaming. Hamburgers and onions, green peas, mashed potatoes, bread and butter and jam, and coffee. The war ~~was~~ and Rome took a back seat for a few minutes while dirty, tired and hungry men dug in. As we stood around eating, Jerry began to shell the crossing. The shells were 88s and come in about one every 30 seconds. Jerry's aim was poor and all of the bursts were out in the fields. Over to the west, furious cannonading broke out. From the sound, it was a half-mile or more away; continuous drumfire.

"That will be the tanks," said an artilleryman, a captain. "Last I heard, we were looking for 10 Mark VIs, or they were looking for us. Sounds like theyv'e found each other."

The firing lasted for three or four minutes and then broke off as suddenly as it began. Several columns of black, oily smoke rose straight up against the early evening sky - casualties.

Finished with food, we held a three-man conference. Col. Lynch had said his orders were to remain at Quadraro for the time being. All other units would do likewise. Possibly we might move on at nightfall; possibly not. He advised that we do as the others and find a billet and catch some sleep.

Surrounding buildings were crammed with officers and men. Temporary command posts sprung up and radios ^{squawked} ~~howled~~ and crackled.

~~xxxxxx provided for places to sleep~~
At each place, we were invited to share floor space, but declined on the obvious ground that there were too many there already.

Finally, in a high-walled garden we found our billet - a large, brick-lined pit, perhaps 10 by 10 feet in area and about six feet deep. Just the thing, a prefabricated foxhole for three, amply deep to afford protection from everything but a direct hit or falling flak. We soon remedied the latter hazard by roofing over ~~the~~ the hole with an overturned farm cart and a large, white door.

"I think this was a mamre pit," said Cook.

"Don't smell bad," said Nixon.

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

I said, thinking of the last war's Old Bill, "If you can find a better 'ole, go to it."

Before we turned in, we took a last look-see. Just outside the garden wall, a 57 mm anti-tank gun was being dug in. One of the gunners said the recent tank battle had not been conclusive. The Mark VIs had withdrawn and might come back. Their orders were to cover the junction. A final check with Colonel Lynch revealed no change in his orders. His guess was that we would move out sometime ~~in~~ during the wee hours. Meanwhile, a company of infantry would go out as soon as darkness fell and clean up the Jerries who had harassed our right that afternoon. He promised to have us roused in ample time in event that movement orders came.

One by one, we descended into the pit and hit the sack. Overflow GIs from the adjacent buildings were digging foxholes in the garden around us and we made doubly sure we would not be left behind by getting them to promise to wake us up if they moved.

Zeke and Ken were off in no time, but sleep came slowly to me. The night was noisy. Our 105s were firing overhead and their muzzle flashes flickered on the building walls and down through the cracks in our ~~XXXXX~~ 'roof'. Distant small arms fire filled in the spaces between the cannonading. The moon came up, bright and full, and its light drew silver streaks across our bedrolls. Planes droned overhead - Jerries by the sound - and once the ~~explosion~~ of heavy bombs shook the pit floor.

I was still awake when a shadow ~~fell~~ blocked ~~me~~ off the moonlight streaming in at the edge of the pit and a GI said, "Hey, down there. Wake up. We move at one."

"OK and thanks," I answered and shook Dixon and Cook. My watch said 12:15.

Once more we went through the familiar routine: dress by touch, wind up the bed rolls, pack the musettes, and take off. Ten minutes and the pit was empty and the jeep full. We backed out of the garden carefully. Some GIs were still asleep on the ~~XXXXXX~~ ground. At Col. Lynch's commandpost, an Italian apartment, a staff conference was in progress. Outside was parked the general's car - Brigadier General Walker, commander of the 36th. The meeting went on for an hour and we ~~XXXXX~~ waited outside, talking and smoking and looking toward Rome.

General Walker came out with his aides. He stopped and spoke to us. Wick Fowler, he said, was still sleeping back up the road. He would stay with the general. The rocky party would continue on, followed by the infantry and guns. Plans called for a quick passage through the city, over the Tiber and to a position at least 10 miles beyond.

The Jerries in the neighborhood had all been rounded up - 1/42 of them and patrols reported no enemy on our flanks for some distance ahead. It looked like clear sailing.

Col. Lynch waited until the general had pulled out and then said, "Let's go!" - and we went, following his command car with rekky cars and tanks behind.

A kilometer is only a little over half a mile - five-eighths, to be exact - and we crossed the city line less than five minutes after leaving Quadraro. This was it - Rome. The city was bathed in soft moonlight. Blocks of large apartment buildings cast black square shadows across the wide smooth avenue. The colonel's car was guided by a young lieutenant who had lived in Rome and the column rolled swiftly onward.

Zeke said, "Listen. Applause."

From the black windows on either side came the patter of hands, polite applause, like one hears at a musicale - no shouts, no confetti, just a soft, steady, never-ending ^{ripple} ~~ripples~~ of sound.

KEK "Weirdest ^{thing} ~~sound~~ I ever heard," said Dixon, "there must be thousands of people up there clapping, but you can't see a soul."

We were never out of earshot of it all through the residential district. It affected us emotionally. The Romans only meant to say, "Welcome." But the clapping said more than that to us. It said that the months of waiting were over; that this was 'it'. It spelled an end - for a time at least - to combat and dirt and death and danger. It roused gladness and exultation and laughter. We three were

"Well, we made it. We made it."

The beauty of the city grew upon us. ~~XX~~ . We drove through spacious piazzas, past beautiful monuments, parks, buildings, shops - all painted silver and black in the light of the moon. Everything seemed clean and orderly, untouched by war and the ruin of war. We had laid our plans as we drove along. We would drop out of the ~~MMI~~ column at some lively spot near the center of the city. Both Zeke and Ken were anxious to write and file stories and must find the public relations office as soon as dawn came. We had the name of the building and its address - it had been selected weeks before, back in Naples.

The piazza we selected for our parting from the rekky troops was huge, ^{imposing} bounded on one side by ~~XXXX~~, colonnaded buildings on one side and a park on the other. In its center ~~was~~^{stood} an ornate fountain, ~~surrounded~~^{surrounding} ~~XXXX~~ rising out of a large circular pool. As we climbed out of the jeep an American lieutenant colonel approached, tagged by three Italian civilians. He was in battle dress and carried a Tommy gun. ~~We introduced ourselves. He~~ ^{He} saluted, ~~XXXXXX~~ shook hands and exchanged introductions. He had arrived a few minutes before and was waiting for his column, scheduled to rendezvous at this point. One of the Romans had a bottle of cognac and offered us a drink. We accepted gratefully and listened while he told us over and over in broken English how glad they were to have us. The Germans, he said,

had started evacuating the city on Saturday and the last of their columns had pulled out late Sunday evening. Our arrival had not been expected for another 24 hours and many of the Romans thought ~~that~~ the reports that we were on the city's outskirts were planted by the Gestapo to catch anti-Fascists. Our informant said he suspected the presence of mines in some public buildings and under certain thoroughfares, but had no certain knowledge. As soon as day came, he guaranteed, there would be a great "festa".

After a while, the Romans went away and we were alone with the colonel. Dawn was almost at hand and there were no signs of his column, which was overdue. A civilian car rolled into the piazza, pushed by three civilians. We stopped it by the fountain pool and asked where they were going. They explained that the vehicle belonged to a doctor and had run out of gas. They were pushing it to a garage.

As we considered this explanation, the silence was ripped wide open by the vicious rattle of a machine pistol and slugs bounced off the pavement nearby. Reactions were automatic. As I dove under the car I saw from the corner of my eye the colonel vault over the rounded rim of the pool and into the waist-deep water. Cook and Dixon had vanished completely and the civilians were crouching alongside the car. One of them was muttering, "Mama mia. Mama mia" over and over.

The shots had come from the roof of the building on our right and the colonel sprayed its parapet with short bursts from his Tommy gun from his water~~er~~ly hideout. Taking advantage of his fire, I scrambled from beneath the car and ran hard for the colonnade of the

nearest building, yanking out my sidearm as I ran. The civilians scuttled after me and sought shelter behind the same fat column. No more shots came and I fired twice at the suspected rooftop, hoping to draw some return and give the colonel a proper target. But nothing happened. We waited for ten minutes more and, one by one, cautiously came out, ready to dive back again if our friend resumed his attentions. But he had gone or quit. Cook and Dixon had been behind some columns further down the sweeping arc of the building's front and we reassembled shooting the Romans and their ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ gasless car away. The colonel was soaking wet and cursing. Battle dress is lined with heavy kersey and weighs like lead when wet.

Dawn and the colonel's column arrived together and he left us to take command. Early rising Romans were coming into the square in increasing numbers and we decided to start our search for the public relations building.

The city came to life as we drove about. The spirit of carnival was abroad. Our columns were pouring along every main artery, roaring through the city in pursuit of Jerry. We recognized individuals - men and officers - and yelled and were yelled at. The sidewalks were jammed with noisy, merry Romans, dressed in their best and clapping and shouting "Vivas" to "I Americani" to "Roosevelt", "Choorcheel" and "Stalin".

Flowers were tossed at men and tanks and jeeps and trucks. The GIs wore garlands about their helmets and small bouquets stuck out of their rifle barrels. We drove slowly, drinking it in like heady champagne.

Our fatigue had~~x~~ vanished. Forgotten were the whiskers;our filthy clothes;our fleas;our smelly bodies.

Now and then we stopped to ask directions and in a trice the jeep was the center of a swirling crowd of laughing Romans -men, women and children. Mothers held their babies high to see. One fat man with a thick,sweeping moustache pulled Zeke half-way out of the jeep and kissed him loudly,full on the lips. Zeke grimaced and the crowd ~~XXXX~~ roared. Frequently,an English voice would cut through the babble of Italian and a voice,man or woman,would say,"God bless you." or "why did you take so long,"

Two mad hours passed before we found the building. The street around it was jammed with press jeeps,correspondents~~x~~, camera-men,and public relations officers. It seemed like every newspaperman ~~XXXX~~ in the Mediterranean theatre was there - British,American,and French. We were greeted with shouts and "Hiya's". We were home. Not much time was wasted on greetings. Zeke and Ken had stories to file. They grabbed their typewriters and ran for the newly set up press room. The trip was over.

The rest of the story has been ~~XXXX~~ oft-told. It is the story of a city delirious with joy. None of us will ever forget that first wild day - soft beds and sheets,wine,shining hotel bathrooms, tubs.~~x~~ And the story-book stuff - the Colosseum,Castel San Angelo, Saint Peter~~x~~'s,Mussolini's balcony in the Palazzo Venezia (P);all right before our eyes.

~~There are other memories,too. Not pleasant memories of~~

We met again later on, the three of us, in a swank bar where the glasses still were inscribed with the Nazi swastika. The room was crowded and buzzing with talk. Romans, men and women, sat and drank and laughed with Americans and British. They talked of liberty, of victory soon, of the end of this awful war, of what to do with Hitler and Mussolini. We talked of more trivial things - of those last, long miles. We laughed at the manure-pit billet and the swan dives into ditches, of the ~~MAXIMIZED~~ and the shave I didn't get, ^{recalled} colonel's jump in the fountain pool. We ~~thought~~ the night marches, ~~XX~~ the engineers, the tankers, the infantry, and the medicos.

Cook said, "There were times I thought we'd never make it."

I said, "We've been lucky, alright. Knock wood."

Dixon said, "There were others who weren't. Let's drink to them."

And we did.

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