



Gunner working sights of 25 pounder in Sicily

WAR HERO

RALPH JACKSON

Melvin Munn's brother-in-law, Hazel Munn's husband

WORLD WAR II

Ralph Jackson was married to Hazel Munn, my father's sister, their parents were Melvin Harris Munn and Edna Marie Andrews Munn. Ralph's lungs were shot up when he was in the military. It happened when they made the beachhead at Anzio, Italy in WWII.

In this campaign, which was fought in Sicily from July 10 to August 6, 1943, and in mainland Italy from September 3, 1943, to February 25, 1945, the fighting was particularly bitter. The Germans, taking full advantage of mountain peaks and swiftly running rivers, made Allied advance very difficult and costly.

Ralph had serious injuries on his back.

The Battle of Anzio was a battle of the Italian Campaign of World War II that took place from January 22, 1944 (beginning with the amphibious landing known as Operation Shingle) until June 5, 1944 (ending with the capture of Rome). The operation was opposed by German forces in the area of Anzio and Nettuno. The initial landing achieved complete surprise with no opposition and a jeep patrol even made it as far as the

outskirts of Rome.

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the German commander in the Italian theater, moved every unit he could spare into a defensive ring around the beachhead. His artillery units had a clear view of every Allied position. The Germans also stopped the drainage pumps and flooded the reclaimed marsh with salt water, planning to entrap the Allies and destroy them by epidemic. For weeks a rain of shells fell on the beach, the marsh, the harbor, and on anything else observable from the hills, with little distinction between forward and rear positions, turned his forces north-west towards Rome, which was captured on June 4, 1944. As a result, the forces of the German Tenth Army fighting at Cassino were able to withdraw and rejoin the rest of the forces in Rome to make a fighting withdrawal to their next assignment.

It is said that Uncle Ralph was still capable of working as an engineer on construction projects.

THE CONQUEST OF SICILY

The assault on Sicily was to be the prelude to the invasion of mainland Europe. The invasion was assigned to the Seventh U.S. Army under Lieut.-General George S. Patton, and the Eighth British Army under General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery. The Canadians were to be part of the British Army.

The 1st Canadian Infantry Division and the 1st Canadian Army Tank Brigade, under the command of Major-General G.G. Simonds, sailed from Great Britain in late June 1943. En route, 58 Canadians were drowned when enemy submarines sank three ships of the assault convoy, and 500 vehicles and a number of guns were lost. Nevertheless, the Canadians arrived late in the night of July 9 to join the invasion armada of nearly 3,000 Allied ships and landing craft.

Just after dawn on July 10, the assault (preceded by airborne landings) went in. Canadian troops went ashore near Pachino close to the southern tip of Sicily and formed the left flank of the five British landings that spread along more than 60 kilometers of shoreline. Three more beachheads were established by the Americans over another 60 kilometers of the Sicilian coast. In taking Sicily, the Allies aimed, as well, to trap the German and Italian armies and prevent their retreat across the Strait of Messina into Italy.

From the Pachino beaches, where resistance from Italian coastal troops was light, the Canadians pushed forward through choking dust, over tortuous mine-filled roads. At first all went well, but resistance stiffened as the Canadians were engaged increasingly by determined German troops who fought tough delaying actions from the vantage points of towering villages and almost impregnable hill positions. On July 15, just outside the village of Grammichele, Canadian troops came under fire from Germans of the Hermann Goering Division. The village was taken by the men and tanks of the 1st Infantry Brigade and Three Rivers Regiment.

Piazza Armerina and Valguarnera fell on successive days, after which the Canadians were directed against

the hill towns of Leonforte and Assoro. Despite the defensive advantages which mountainous terrain gave to the Germans, after bitter fighting both places fell to the Canadian assault. Even stiffer fighting was required as the Germans made a determined stand on the route to Agira. Three successive attacks were beaten back before a fresh brigade, with overwhelming artillery and air support, succeeded in dislodging the enemy. On July 28, after five days of hard fighting at heavy cost, Agira was taken.

Meanwhile, the Americans were clearing the western part of the island and the British were pressing up the east coast toward Catania. These operations pushed the Germans into a small area around the base of Mount Etna where Catenanuova and Regalbuto were captured by the Canadians.

The final Canadian task was to break through the main enemy position and capture Adrano. Here, they continued to face not only enemy troops, but also the physical barriers of a rugged, almost trackless country. Mortars, guns, ammunition, and other supplies had to be transported by mule trains. Undaunted, the Canadians advanced steadily against the enemy positions, fighting literally from mountain rock to mountain rock.

With the approaches to Adrano cleared, the way was prepared for the closing of the Sicilian campaign. The Canadians did not take part in this final phase, however, as they were withdrawn into reserve on August 7. Eleven days later, British and American troops entered Messina. Sicily had been conquered in 38 days.

The Sicilian campaign was a success. Although many enemy troops had managed to retreat across the strait into Italy, the operation had secured a necessary air base from which to support the liberation of mainland Italy. It also freed the Mediterranean sea lanes and contributed to the downfall of Mussolini, thus allowing a war-weary Italy to sue for peace.

The invasion of the Italian mainland was to be the next great operation.

