

LIFE'S REPORTS

WAR PHOTOGRAPHERS' STORIES

LIFE'S CAMERAMEN DESCRIBE THEIR BATTLE EXPERIENCES ON SECOND FRONT AND ON ROAD TO ROME

Frank Scherschel: The first mission on D-day over northern France by the group of Marauders with which I flew was the easiest operational trip I ever made. We thought it was going to be murder but it wasn't. To show you how easy it was, I ate my bar of chocolate. In every other operational trip I sweated so much the chocolate they gave us melted in my breast pocket. After this trip over the beaches I found the chocolate all in one piece.

At our briefing the CO said, "This is it," and everybody yelled like mad Indians. Our target was a battery of six heavy shore guns that would raise hell with the boats coming into the beaches unless they were silenced. We had to lay our bombs down at precisely 6:25, for the troops on our beach were to touch down at exactly that moment.

It was raining, misty and cold as we got into our ships. We arrived over the target almost five minutes early because of a heavy tail wind, but held our bombs until the appointed time. We had been instructed to go down below cloud level, even if it was 1,000 ft., in order to hit our target right on the nose. Actually we were able to bomb from about 6,000 feet.

Some flak came up but there were no enemy planes. There were Forts, Liberators, fighters and fighter bombers everywhere—all of them ours. We wouldn't have had to shoot down enemy planes even if they had been there. We would simply have run over them.

David Scherman: I called at the Admiralty in London about 8 a. m. the Thursday before D-day. The hall had been cleared by an advance guard to make sure nobody talked to us on the way out to our sealed buses. About halfway to our destination sealed apple juice and sealed Spam sandwiches were broken out. We arrived at a sealed port and immediately boarded an LCVP which dropped us at various ships and landing craft.

I sailed on an LST, in Section One, Group Two, Western Naval Task Force. We were under way at 3:15 Monday morning in a rough sea. At 3:17 Tuesday morning we anchored and dropped our LC boats. Then we dropped our amphibious vehicles, known as "ducks," which went off saying, "Quack, quack." Our bow doors closed at H plus one and the skipper rubbed his hands and said, "Well, let's go back to England."

We passed a craft resembling a Hoboken ferry. It was a square-shaped, frame double-decker with six chimneys. The signal officer, who was groggy anyhow from lack of sleep, yelled, "Captain! What the hell is that piece of equipment?" We had seen every landing craft so far but this. On its side was painted "LCK." We looked that up in the orders and read, "Landing Craft, Kirchen," then promptly signaled them for "a double malted, a ham on rye and forget the mustard." Blinked back the six-chimneyed LCK steaming toward the beaches: "Baloney!"

When we landed back in England I was standing on the lower deck waiting for the bow doors to open so I could shoot the loading master signaling to us from the wharf and the immediate mad activity that I was sure would attend our arrival. The bow doors started groaning open and I waited with camera poised for the historic picture of whoever was outside. There was one person standing there—a swarthy character with a two-day beard, expectantly focusing his camera for the historic picture of whatever emerged from the slowly opening bow doors. He was LIFE's Robert Capa.

Along with their extraordinary pictorial records, LIFE's photographers covering the battlefields of Europe in France and Italy (for LIFE and the U. S. still-picture pool) sent in written messages describing incidents which offended their picture-taking. Their reports are hasty and highly personalized, set down with casualness and humor that only thinly disguises the danger of their work. The stories by and about them are printed here as sharp and illuminating footnotes to history.

Robert Capa: I was going to Normandy on this nice, clean transport ship with a unit of the 1st Division. The food was good and we played poker. Once I filled an inside straight but I had four nines against me. Then just before 6 o'clock we were lowered in our LCVP and we started for the beach. It was rough and some of the boys were politely puking into paper bags. I always said this was a civilized invasion.

We heard something popping around our boat but nobody paid any attention. We got out of the boat and started wading and then I saw men falling and had to push past their bodies. I said to myself, "This is not so good." I was going in very elegant with my raincoat on my left arm, but at that moment I had a feeling I would not need the raincoat. I let go of it and hid behind some tanks that were firing on the beach.

After 20 minutes I suddenly realized that the tanks were a certain amount of cover from small-arms fire but that they were what the Germans were shooting shells at, so I made for the beach. I fell down next to a guy who looked at me and said, "This is harder than sweating out an inside straight." And another guy said, "I see my old mother sitting on the porch waving my insurance policy."

It was very unpleasant there and having nothing else to do I started shooting pictures. After an hour and a half my film was all used up and I saw an LCI behind me with a lot of medics getting out and getting killed as they got out. I waited in the water for all the medics to get out and then I climbed aboard. Then I felt a slight shock and my eyes were all covered with feathers. I thought, "What is this? Is somebody killing chickens?" Then I saw that the superstructure was shot away and the feathers were stuffing from the kapok jackets of men who had been killed. The skipper was crying because his assistant had been blown all over him and he was a mess. Then things got confused. I was very exhausted. Some men were giving transfusions to the wounded. An LCVP came for the wounded and I went with them.

Ralph Morse: It was some time after actual operations started that the first casualties began to come back to our ship lying off the Normandy beach. It was a difficult and dangerous job to transport them from the beaches through the shallow water and to haul them aboard, strapped to their stretchers. But the job was done and the deck of our ship soon began to take on the look of a casualty ward. Urgent cases were attended to as they lay there. Others were taken into specially equipped surgeries where doctors carried out emergency operations despite the heavy roll of the ship.

On the way back troops who were fit enough, and even some who were not, played poker for French invasion money in little groups. In one corner a sailor was sifting through a pile of clothing that had been cut off our casualties, sorting out personal belongings for return either to the wounded men or to their relatives.

Robert Landry (Messages from this photographer were brief. The first one received by the London office, along with his pictures, stated: "I have lost my shoes." Landry had gone in with American troops to Ste. Mère-Eglise. The latest message from Landry reported: "The first Army nurses have arrived. They splashed ashore and



LIFE's Invasion team (standing): Robert Landry, George Rodger, Frank Scherschel, Robert Capa; (squatting): Ralph Morse, John Morris, David Scherman.



PHOTOGRAPHERS CARL MYDANS AND GEORGE SILK MEET EN ROUTE TO ROME

LIFE'S REPORTS (continued)

walked five miles to the village. Prettiest nurse is Lieut. Margaret Stanfill of Hayti, Mo. She is 23 and single."

Carl Mydans (in Italy): We tried for the back approach to a monastery. The Germans dropped a shell right at the first hairpin bend, 150 yards beyond us. We started back into the valley with the jeep. By now we were scared and wanted to get out fast. The house we had passed coming up, with a soldier sitting in front of it, had been hit. The soldier was gone. I hope he got away. Our jeep fairly flew: The bombed and gutted road seemed smooth as our wheels hardly touched the ground. Suddenly I realized the road was unfamiliar. But Cass of Paramount, who was driving, said, "This is the way we came." In a moment, however, there was no further question. A limb of a tree was across the shelled road and we jammed on our brakes. We had been heading straight into German territory. The next five minutes going back, I am sure, broke all speed records for jeeps.

I had another close call at Velletri when I took a picture of a huge bottle of wine with a German helmet perched on top. I tried to move the bottle slightly into better light. It was too heavy so I got a GI to help me shove it about six inches. Later two soldiers picked up the bottle, which then proved to be booby-trapped. It blew up, seriously injuring them.

Will Lang (LIFE's Rome correspondent): Yesterday while driving from Rome in a captured German car Carl Mydans and I were hit by carbon-monoxide poisoning from the exhaust, Mydans badly and myself slightly. Carl was unconscious but was revived with roadside artificial respiration and later given oxygen in a Naples hospital. Mydans is remaining in the hospital for another day for a check, but I saw him this morning and he's up and all right.

After the Velletri capture Photographer George Silk and I were pinned down for half an hour by heavy German eyebrow-singeing shelling. Having just seen what one American shell had done to 10 Germans, we were so nervous that Silk spent five futile minutes trying to change his film before he noticed he was jamming a roll of Life Savers into his camera.



JOHN PHILLIPS JOINED MYDANS, SILK AND FIFTH ARMY AT CAPTURE OF ROME