

## Sgt. Palmer's Road to Rome

Having been relieved from the German Gustav Winter line for a few weeks of training, and new recruits from the U.S. The rumor is that we will be going to Anzio. The Invasion of Anzio had been a walk in, but as always the bickering Generals, held their troops back, and dug in. This was to be one of the worst mistakes of the Italian Campaign. The troops and hospital Units at Anzio were the steady targets of the neverending artillery, and mortars, and German Infantry Patrols. Casualties were severe.

So it is about the middle of May 1944 when the rumors are flying as always, that the 36<sup>Th</sup>. will be going to Anzio, and it did happen. Our Division landed at Anzio with out any problems, we would relieve, the 15 Th.Reg.of the Therd Div. Of course they had to give up their comfortable Foxholes. But they were handed over with great joy. So as we settled in the word came down that patrols would be sent out at night only. I was Squad leader, and would be responsible with my platoon leader to have the order carried out. Every one at Anzio was very nervous, including the Krauts, for they new that the 36<sup>Th</sup>. had landed, and they had fought the 36<sup>Th</sup>. all the way since Salerno Invasion. It would be only a few days when our Div.Commander Genaral Walker was in his Piper Cub, flying a reconaissance flight, and had determined that he seen a way to Infiltrate two Regiments behind the German Lines.



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So now according to history the Generals, would be at it again, finally after several days of rangling, Clark would bless the plan, but made it clear to Gen. Walker that it was his head if it failed. Clark was still pissed because Walker had disagreed with him at the Rapido River debacle, in the end Walker would be chopped anyway.

So two Regiments were alerted. They would be the 142, and my Regiment the 143. We would be given orders that no rifle will have any rounds in their chambers. Every one will be issued extra ammo, it would include, 30 Cal. ammo, both rifle bandoleers and mechine gun ammo, extra Mortar rounds and our two canteens full of water, and a couple extra K.rations

So at dusk, this last day of May 31,1944 two Regiments of the 36 Inf. Div. were on their way to what could be a disaster, or one the greatest moves any two Regiments had made in the War to date. It will now be more personal, as each Squad Leader was responsible for his men. As the 142 led the way, in a very strung out column, the men were very nervous, at every ten minute break, as the moon wasn't a factor until around midnight. It was great to help in the silent march over the grassy trails, but to the men, it gave them visions of of someone moving as the wind moved the bush's. This was a very tense march as the war in the town of Veletri was at its peak, and our nerves were about shot. For myself as Squad leader, I was thinking, of a few souviners that I had in my pocket so, I bent down and buried them in the soft dirt on Mt. Artissimo to be part of that mountain



forever. As daylight began we were still moving ever so quite, along the Mountain Trail as platoon leader Sgt. Hupman said Ben take your squad to the left and protect the Companies left flank. As my squad moved along at the same pace as the Company, there was a shot, from an outpost, that we had walked into. This German was apparently left as a guard, as he was the only one encountered. But his luck had ran out. I had fired my M.1 from the waist level, which was normal for any patrol action. The German Soldier had run out of luck as Sgt. Hupman hurried over to see, if I was allright. I was O.K. but the Germans cries for help, really got to me because he would die, and I just had to guess what he was crying out for. I would hear his last words that I would not understand. Hupman came along and said Palmer, it could have been you, lets go. For I do not know how many lives of the enemy I am responsible for. Thank God I don't know. This one will never leave my mind, but War isn't kind, as I well know.

So we moved on and disrupted many Germans that morning, some were shaving, eating, and in general wondering where in Hell we came from. Prisoners were taken, but they were the luckey ones, the war was over for them, we had many months of War left.

As the morning wore on we could see, and hear the great battles being fought in the valley, from Veletre, towards Rome was about six miles. This whole Valley

seemed to be moving, the road to Rome was to be a reality within a few hours. But as I was leading the first squad across a patch of very tall reeds, David Arvizu said to Ben what is that awful smell, as we moved a short distance further where apparently our Tanks had flattened a quite large area, but as we walked into the area we saw parts of German uniforms and mangled German soldiers, that had thought they were safe hiding in those tall reeds. We had no idea how many had been trapped and mangled there. The stench was so bad that one will never forget it in our lifetime. We couldn't get out of that horrible site fast enough. As Mark Clark was getting his Photo Opt. in Rome for all the world news media, we were being greeted with open arms.

Our orders were keep moving, as the Germans were trying to save everything they could as they fled North. We would soon find them, as their roadblocks were murder. Rome was in allied hands. After the bloodiest fighting American, and Allied troops had been engaged in his Country of Mountains called Italy.

We soon learned that on 6/6/44 the landing at Normandy would be well on its way. For the American troops that fought from Salerno up to the Liberation of Rome. It was a great day, for us that survived, to celebrate this great day of Rome's liberation. But to us, the few that were still with our units, would have tears in

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our eyes for our comrades, that are not with us to celebrate, this great Victory. God Bless them all.

Our time in Rome was just the passing thru, pursuing the Germans with everything at our command. The Inf. and support troops neverstop as the Inf. must keep the Germans moving north. We have moved so fast that our supplies are far behind. The weather is very warm and we have our wool O.D. clothes that we have worn for weeks, with no showers, or change of cloths. Water and rations were so short, that all trucks not carrying water or rations were to drop their loads and get water and rations. So as we push Jerry North, against many dangerous Road Blocks, we are about worn out from day and night combat. We are about two hundred fifty miles north of Rome, at a village named Grosseto, it was late in the afternoon when we heard a lot of hollering and as I looked back and seen this large concrete tank, and of course it had to be Grossetos Drinking Water, well not one of us Non. Coms. would say boys that's the city drinking water, and you shouldn't be swimming in the cities drinking water. We had made up our minds that this war was the Itilians war, and we thought they owed us big time. We all got our shorts washed, a happy Company B.

So as our rations and water caught up, we get new orders. First we will bivouac just North of Rome where most of us will get a few hourpass to Rome. Where the

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Romans already have learned to charge great prices for third class jewelry, and gifts, for the folks back home. We get to see the Pope at his Window overlooking the Vatican, of course we don't understand a word of his speech. I was able to buy my Mother a Cameo, and the sister's a few trinkets, to mail home.

We had been told that we are now in the Seventh Army, cheers went up, this Division had enough of Mark Clark. The 5th. Army and Clark will stay in Italy to Wars end in Austria. We will truck back to Southern Italy, for a new assignment. It will be the Invasion of Southern France. So now after we get south of Naples, and settled down to a new routine. First it will be new replacements to fill our ranks. We as Non.Coms.get to meet the new G.I.Kids fresh out of a Inf. Training Camp from the States. Everyone scared shitless as I was many months ago. So the training begins, as we try to help these new kids in this new and scary Army, and try and prepare them for the unknown ahead. Which takes place on the 8/15/44. This will be the Invasion of Southern France. A new Country, a new Army, and God Knows what the outcome might be. This is the Army, of no frills. This is my knowledge of an important part of the G.I s War in Europe. As written by survivor Bennett J. Palmer

*Bennett J. Palmer*