CHAPLAINS FACE SHELL FIRE MINISTERING TO FIGHTING MEN

Grim Encounter With Huns at Ortona—Orsogna Crossroads Described By Hon. Capt. E. W. MacQuarrie

Where the troops go—under a rain of enemy shell fire, shattering mortar bombs and the deadly spray of machine gun pellets—there also go the soldiers' gallant friends, valiant clergymen of the Canadian chaplaincy service. Two local chaplains already have earned the Military Cross. Another, in a letter received by a brother here recently, describes his work in the battle of the Ortona-Orsogna crossroads, a grim encounter in mud and cold where chaplains worked with forward patrols and helped bring in the wounded when the Jerries were cleared from the area. The chaplain is Hon. Capt. E. W. MacQuarrie, brother of C. G. McQuarrie, 120 Dunsmure road, who has been with Canadians in the 8th Army since the Italian show began.

Take Shelter in Graves

"So you read about me being at the battle of the Ortona-Orsogna cross roads," Capt. MacQuarrie wrote his brother. "I remember the day the press man was there. As we stood looking at the graves an artillery barrage opened up and we jumped into two open graves. From there we saw shells strike several of our positions. Three landed less than 100 feet away. The photographer in the next grave got pictures of it all. It was quite a spell.

"A day or two later we pushed through to the crossroads and cleared the Jerries out. Christmas day I was at the same spot and were just sitting down to dinner when the Germans laid a heavy barrage over our companies. We went on with dinner, but before we finished had word of casualties, so we left the table and went out to bring in our dead and wounded. We had to add to the graves you have read about already.

Soldier Appreciative

"Incidentally, these were the last to be buried there. We worked on the plot quite a bit and I have been told it is the finest cemetery in the division. One lad came to me on Christmas day and said: 'Padre, I don't agree with you on all points (that's army frankness for you), but I do want to thank you for the graves.'"

Overseas for quite some time, Capt. MacQuarrie has revisited many of the places he saw in 1936 when he visited Europe on an exchange scholarship. A graduate of Victoria College, Toronto, he attended Cambridge. Later he toured England, Germany and Italy. Before enlistment, he was a United Church minister at Val D'or and Burlamaque, P.Q.

In one letter he describes his first bath since July, of 1943, made possible when he discovered a bathtub in the ruins of a house and his batman managed to heat some water.

Holds Service Under Fire

In another letter he wrote: "On Christmas day I had the largest attendance at Communion service since I have been in the army. That was the only service I could hold and during all the time I was drowned out by the mortars firing near us, and by artillery fire. It was a splendid contrast."

He tells of finding oil paintings in the rubble of a bombed building which he cleaned and used to furnish his quarters.

"Like yourself," he wrote, "we are all waiting for news of the northern invasion. What a blow that will be—on top of the terrific air bombardment now going on. We pin our hopes for an early conclusion of the war on that landing."

Huddle Before Fire

To indicate that men in the front-lines appreciate the problems of those back home, he stated in another letter: "Greeting for 1944! May this year be one of the best in the lives of all of us. . . . For us in the army we yearn for release from its stern duties—and for you at home I know it will also mean release from fear, tedium and anxiety."

In the same letter he gave this information: "Just now I am huddled in the corner of a wrecked house, with a big fire going in the fireplace in front of me. A Canadian corporal and two of our privates are sitting facing the fire and an English artillery bombardier is sitting next to me. They are showing each other photographs and laughing. A few feet back of our house some of the big guns are waiting with their baying mouths pointed toward the German lines. But inside, under the patched roof, we are quite comfortable. There are so much worse places to be in than this. Our lads in the front trenches have been soaking, cold and mud-covered now for days on end."

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