

# Engineers Sweat Under Fire To Beat Out Time

## Tanks had to Cross the Moro, So Canadians Built Bridge



By **Dick Sanburn** (Tribune War Correspondent)

WITH THE CANADIANS ON THE MORO RIVER FRONT, Dec 13 --- (Delayed)—For more than seven hours under continuous fire from artillery, multiple mortars and machine guns, Canadian engineers from an Ottawa unit sweated it out to build a vital bridge across the Moro River.

They had been told the bridge had to be completed by dawn to enable our tanks to cross in support of our infantry, already on the far side, for during the day German tanks had been spotted racing up to counter-attack.

**If our tanks were not across by first light, the position of our troops would be grave.**

At 11 pm., the work began on this race against time. At 6.10 a.m., the first of our tanks rolled across the Moro to clinch the infantry's grip on the bridgehead.

Today praises were ringing in the ears of the sappers of that unit. Its commander is Major R. B. Fraser of Toronto and Montreal.

For two nights prior, the unit sat on this side of the Moro. During the dark hours reconnaissance parties crept cautiously down to the river to check the materials required for the crossing. In daytime, engineers studied the terrain through field glasses with the help of aerial photos and large-scale maps.

Just after dusk on the night the diversion and bridge were to be built, a reconnaissance party headed by Lieut. Sid Kenyon of Hamilton with Sergeant Jack Foley of Ottawa, set out to complete the plan by driving stakes along the route of the diversion and laying white tape to guide the sappers working in the dark. The Germans had blown a 140-foot gap in a stone bridge, and then had the position so well under observation that construction at a new bridge on the same spot was completely impossible.

The first part of the job was that of bulldozer driven by Sapper Milton McNaughton of London, Ont., who distinguished himself throughout the whole operation. Because the ground was just a sea of mud, it was necessary for the bulldozer to gouge away the wet earth as deep as possible, making a sunken base on which to lay heavy timber and ties.

Sapper McNaughton did the job on this side of the river, and when the time came to dig a similar road up the far side, he drove the bulldozer right up into enemy fire with machine guns streaming at him from three sides. He jumped off the bulldozer and went back to the company, leaving his big machine on the hillside with hundreds of bullets striking and ricocheting off.

Nobody would order any man to go back to that spot, but less than 30 minutes later McNaughton was heard saying, "I'd better go get it -- I'm doing no good sitting 'round here." And go back to get it he did.

## Seven Hours of Hell

Through those seven hours of living hell, the Canadians worked ahead on that diversion. They carried huge ties along a muddy path left by the bulldozer and dumped them securely in place. They carried 48 huge petrol drums down to the Moro to construct a small bridge covered with debris from the wrecked bridge nearby.

For every minute of those seven hours in the darkness, these Canadians were under incessant fire from 14 machinegun posts, from ordinary mortars, from multiple mortars, and from 88-millimetre guns with their flaming red tracers, from German machine guns, which spit streams of death into the area, and in the words of Sgt.-Maj. Harold Glowski, Toronto. "every tracer headed anywhere in your general direction looks as if it is coming straight at you personally."

Sgt.-Maj. Glowski continued: "But when the first tank started across at dawn Jerry really turned everything loose—everything we had been getting all night plus lire from the heaviest artillery firing seven-inch shells."

But the diversion stuck, the bridge stayed, and our tanks went over with anti-tank guns to counter any approaching Germans in tanks. The engineers had done their usual first-rate job.

The plan was to build a new road leading on the old one down to a new spot on the river, lay a new shod bridge there and then build another new road from the far end of the bridge back on to the main road. This entailed a 640-foot diversion, plus bridge, to go in under enemy fire.

## Making A Road In Dark

As darkness fell there lined up near the approach to the diversion, 30 big trucks loaded with heavy poles, with which to construct a road base strong enough to carry tanks. For 20 hours men hard laboured obtaining this material, tearing out roof beams from wrecked houses, cutting down olive trees, tearing up railroad ties, and sawing telephone poles into lengths.

The result was 30 truckloads of ties, each 12 feet long, eight inches in diameter.

Working ahead of the sappers building the diversion and bridge were a party minesweeping the area over which the road up the far side had to go. In charge was Sgt. Norman McQuade, of Sarnia, who did a magnificent job, and topped it off by taking three German prisoners, although neither he nor his companions carried any arms at all. McQuade and his party discovered and pulled ten teller (plate) mines from the route of the oncoming road.

Special tribute has been paid to Sgt Oscar Mellick. Ottawa, who was on the job all the time, encouraging the sappers and keeping morale at peak with complete cheerfulness, despite the inferno raging on all sides.

Another officer who took a leading part in the job was Lt. P. R. V. Carr-Harris. of Kingston.

One man who had no business in the vicinity of this magnificent job, but who went down the river "just to see how the boys are doing" was Cpl. Archie Ouellette, Ottawa, company

cook and former pro baseball player. Ouellette made his own reason for the trip by taking along great pots of hot tea for the men on the job who took their only rest under the shelter of the bridge the Germans had blown up.