

HOUSE PARTY

By Lieutenant Colonel William P. Yarborough

ON the Anzio-Nettuno section of the 1:50,000 Italian map, the Allied beachhead can almost be covered with two steel helmets, GI. [This was written in March.—Ed.] In this area every inch of ground has been skyrocketing in value faster than the world's supply of scotch whiskey—and is as difficult to get.

Here there is stabilization of front firmer than any known during World War I. Its rigidity is braced and counterbraced with thousands of mines of all types and with the fires of high-velocity antitank weapons in addition to normal wire and defensive works.

On the outer fringe of just such a prepared area, where the defenses were just beginning to congeal, were a row of concrete farmhouses.

Division wanted two of those houses—so did the Krauts.

ABOUT fifteen thousand yards to the north of our lines, rising toward the Italian sky in an irregularly shaped mass, is Colli Laziali [the Alban Hills], the last large terrain barrier between us and Rome.

Velletri and Genzano are up there. We can see the sun gleam on their red tiled roofs.

The Kraut infests those heights. His dirty cream-colored lorries and volkswagens flow in an endless stream along the Velletri-Rome road in full view of our front. When our aircraft appear, the whole hillside springs to life with Jerry ack-ack flashes stabbing into the sky from hidden positions. These batteries are high enough so that the guns seem to peer over the edges of our foxholes. Their whistling messages constantly remind us to keep our posteriors stationary and camouflaged.

Now come south from the hill mass toward our own front line. Jerryland to the immediate north of us, like our own sector, is flat and marshy. It is cut in innumerable places by a crisscross network of ditches and drainage canals, most of them one and one-half to three feet deep. A few of these canals are deep enough to let a man walk upright in them without being seen. Some have sparse fringes of brush growing along their banks.

Superimposed upon the drainage canal network, is the spider's web of the road system, spanning the marshes and irregularly checkerboarding the green fields which they cross with white, straight lines.

The tile-roofed concrete farmhouses are nestled among

haystacks and outbuildings and are found almost exclusively along the roads. Where these roads meet at infrequent junctions or are crossed by marked terrain features, miniature villages crop up.

Such is shell-battered little Carano, lying deserted now in the Pontine marshlands, surrounded by dead cattle and shell craters half-filled with water.

Here is an aerial photo. Run your finger to the northwest from Carano along the gleaming surface of the metaled road and start counting the farmhouses. Our troops are dug in the débris of houses one, two, and three. A trio of Jerry Panther tanks lies huddled in *rigor mortis* behind House 3 where our tank destroyers KO'd them a few days before.

Our outpost line falls sharply away from House 3 toward the southwest, crossing a drainage ditch running roughly north and south.

Continue cautiously along the road toward House 4. You are now in No Man's Land. When you reach House 5, you will be in Kraut country sure enough.

Keep moving toward Spaccasassi. You are getting deeper and deeper into Jerryland. Look carefully among the rubble and shadows around Houses 9, 10, 11, and 12. Those ominous objects with the long gun barrels lying close to the buildings, are the German Mark IV and Mark V tanks which have been shelling Carano with flat-trajectory stuff.

Let's hurry and finish this reconnaissance. Orders are waiting for us back at our command post.

The Battalion will assault and occupy Houses 5 and 6, outposting, organizing, and holding them until relieved by elements of the 2d Battalion, —th Infantry on the night of D plus 1. . . .

Luckily, we are familiar with the terrain. Our battalion has only recently withdrawn from that area to division reserve, after spending forty-three days in contact with the Kraut.

THE PREPARATION

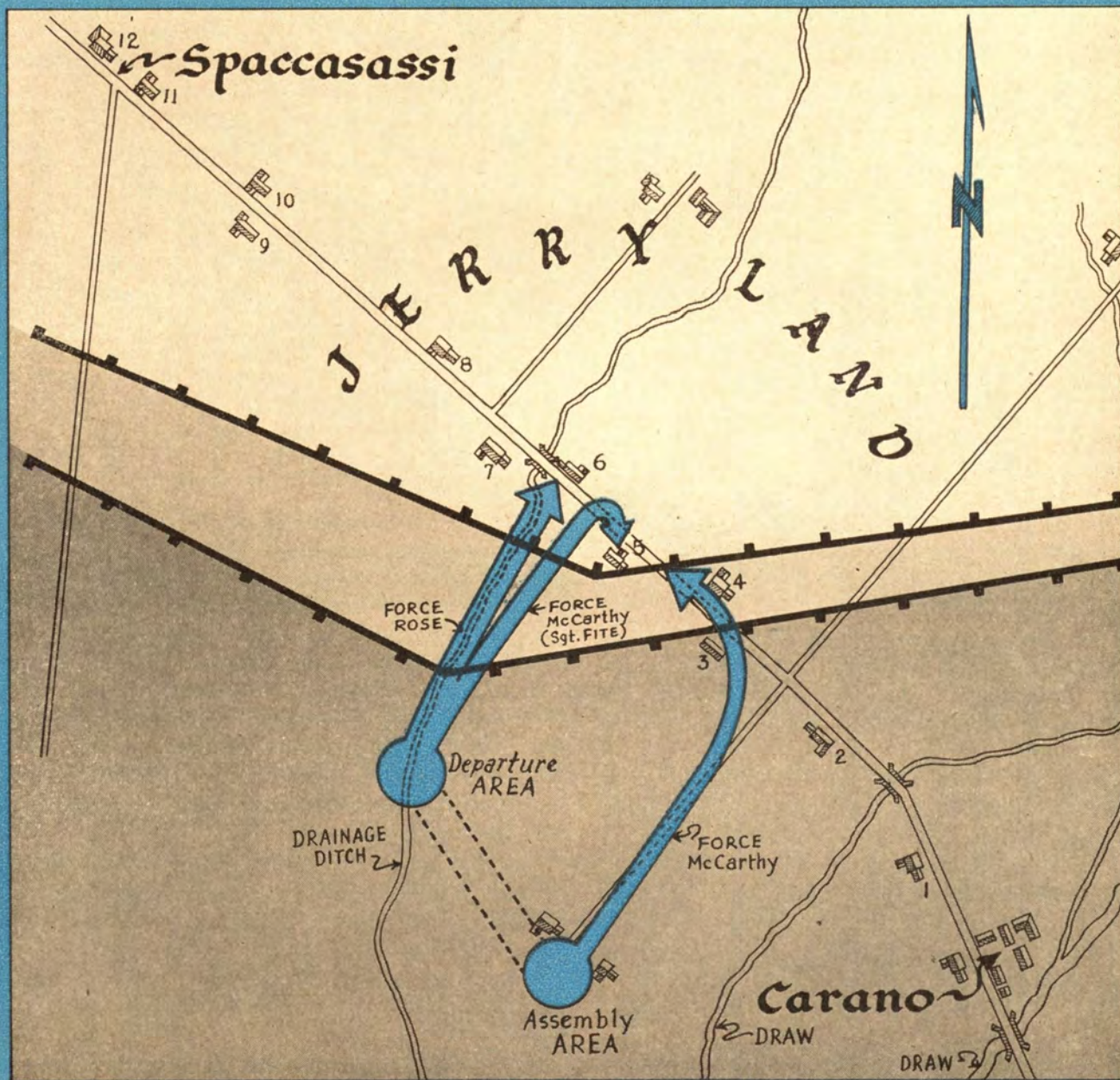
WE had assaulted House 5 once before—with a platoon—and had been driven back by intense machine-gun and machine-pistol fire from in and around it.

Company C has a strength of one hundred and twelve men, and should be able to take the two houses. To make

in JERRYLAND

absolutely sure this time, we will bring Company A, one hundred and ten men strong, and hold it in reserve in case we need it. We will send our light machine-gun platoon (eight guns) and our 81mm. mortar platoon into positions

to support the assault. The 81mm. mortars are pretty heavy to carry across country, so we will substitute 60mm. mortars instead, and make up for the difference in weight by hauling in extra ammunition. We figure that about 600 rounds



of 60mm. should do the job. For the LMGs, eight boxes per gun should be enough.

Mortars and machine guns will go into position during the night preceding D minus 1. The crews are to work all night digging in and building up an ammunition supply at the guns. They will then lie doggo throughout the next day. But they will study the ground to their front very carefully so that come nightfall they will have a clear picture of the scene of the coming fight.

The communications section also is to go forward during the night preceding D minus 1. They are to carry plenty of wire and a six-drop switchboard which will be emplaced and tied into our battalion CP, to the —th Infantry regimental CP, to two supporting tank destroyers, and to our Company A in reserve. When the attack starts, we will lay an assault line to Company C, following it along toward the objective as far as possible.

We will send a 300 radio along with Company C to use with the one at Battalion in case the wire goes out, which it is certain to do when the Jerry artillery begins to arrive. To supplement the 300 set, Company C will also carry a 511. We will keep one 511 at the battalion CP to bolster this net, and we will spot our radio jeep with its 284 back near the —th Infantry's switchboard which is tied into our own by a direct line as well as by the one through the tank destroyers.

Company C can talk to its platoons through the 536 net. We figure that we are fat in the way of communications.

THE CEREBRATIONS

THE tactical formulas open to us for this operation are extremely limited. The enemy has no flanks and he is well wired in. This particular pair of buildings is part of a series of mutually supporting strong points. What shall we do, attack frontally or attack frontally?

After due consideration, we adopt the latter course, with modifications as follows:

Company C will send one squad, reinforced with a bazooka team to attack toward the northwest, well spread out along the road from the direction of Carano. This squad will be from Lieutenant McCarthy's platoon. We'll call it Force McCarthy.

Lieutenant Rose's platoon will attack north along the shallow drainage canal, which runs close by House 6. The remainder of Lieutenant McCarthy's platoon under Platoon Sergeant Fite will follow Rose closely up the drainage canal.

First Sergeant O'Brien will hold the 3d Platoon in reserve along the ditch line. He will protect the left flank of Rose's platoon by fire. When the exercise gets under way, we hope it will work as follows:

(1) Force McCarthy will move toward House 5 from the direction of Carano until he draws fire. When this inevitable occurrence takes place, he will engage the enemy with fire. He will seek to continue the advance by infiltration thus occupying a portion of the enemy's attention and facilitating Rose's advance.

(2) Force Rose will move to the north toward House 6 along the drainage ditch until it draws fire. Upon receipt of such Jerry attentions, the part of Force McCarthy which

has been following Rose, will leave the ditch line and will head for House 5, well deployed.

(3) The three maneuvering elements now advancing, will isolate their house objectives before commencing to work on them. After the ground to the rear and flanks of the enemy-held buildings has been outposted, the resistance in the houses themselves will be reduced.

Should the going prove extremely rough, First Sergeant O'Brien's platoon will be committed by Captain Boettner, the company commander, or by Lieutenant Rodriques, the company executive, should Captain Boettner lose contact.

Should the whole of Company C be unable to take the objectives, then Company A will be committed, attacking from the direction of Carano. Since Company A represents the Last of the Mohicans, the battalion staff, and headquarters will go along too, staking the works on double or nothing. These houses are serious business. Division wants the house line for a line of departure. We'll capture them or else.

There is plenty of artillery support available. Supporting fires from division and corps artillery have been prearranged. The trouble is, however, that an extensive artillery preparation always draws down an enthusiastic Kraut counterpreparation from the batteries on Colli Laziali. We'll call for a good stonk about five hours before our assault. This should fall on the areas we know to be occupied by Heinies. When we attack at 0100 hours, the Jerry counterpreparation should have died down. We'll try to close with the guy before his cannon can break up our approach march.

Near our bivouac area we find a section of rehearsal terrain which bears a tolerable resemblance to the actual thing. First we run a daylight CPX with the officers, platoon sergeants, and communications men. Then we repeat the rehearsal the next night with all of the men who are to participate. We're now loaded for bear.

THE OPERATION

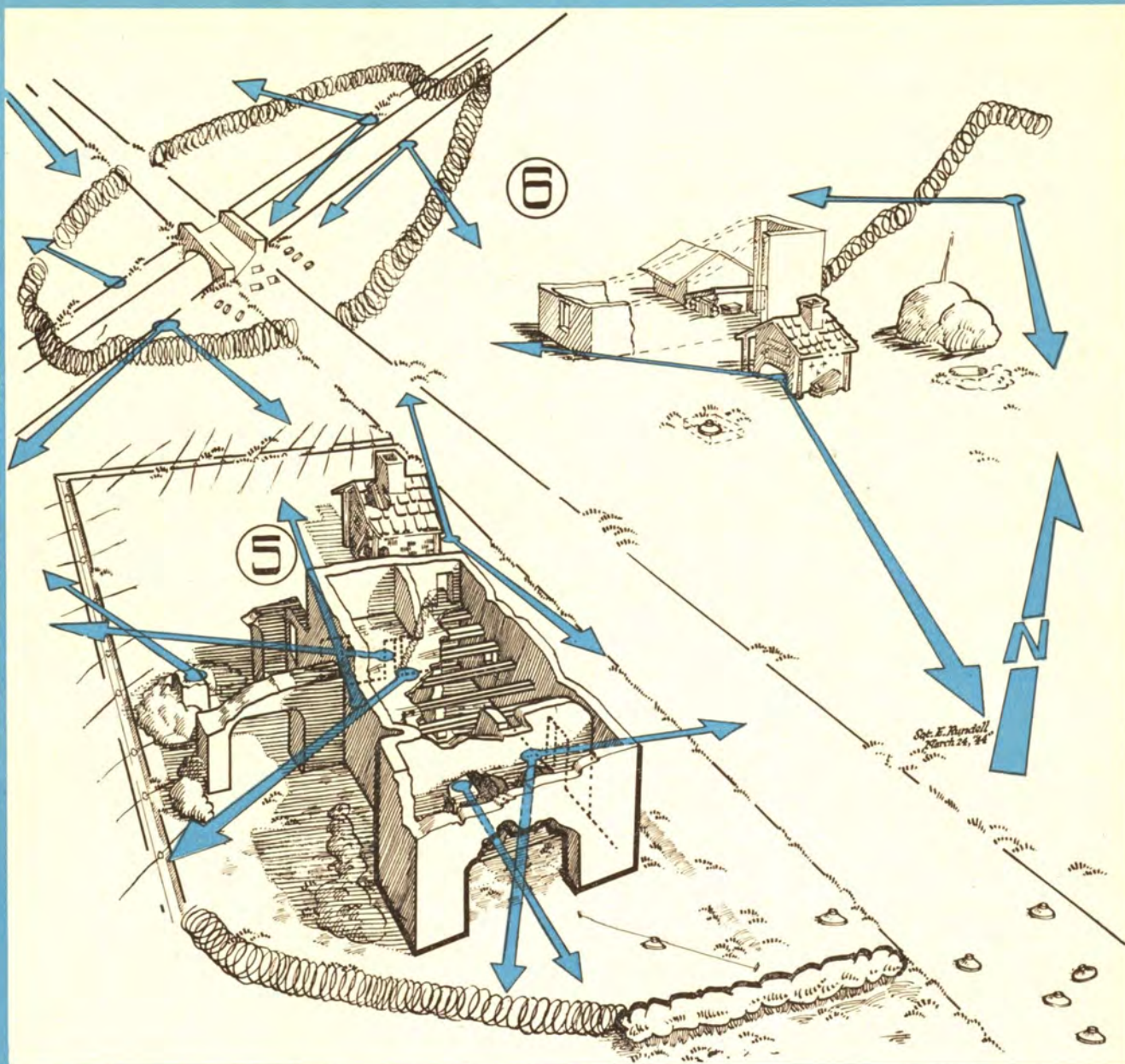
COMPANIES A and C leave the bivouac area at 2100. The night is pitch black. The moon is not due for over two hours. Our assault elements are in position by 2330 and report into the 300 net. The ground is muddy and slippery. Progress in the pitch blackness has been slow and difficult, but the moon is beginning to appear. The guides from the —th Infantry contact Captain Boettner at the departure area. They will lead Rose's platoon through their front-line wire. Force McCarthy moves stealthily around toward Carano from which direction his diversion will start.

Silently the assault elements disperse within the departure area and wait for H-hour.

Jerry is throwing the usual amount of artillery. Several rounds fall into Company A's reserve area along the deep ditch Fosso del Carano, killing two men and wounding two.

Two or three long greenish-white bursts of Kraut machine-gun tracers squirt impersonally over our area from positions beyond Houses 5 and 6.

Our men lie in the mud like statues as the moon climbs. The hands of my watch move toward zero hour. Force McCarthy is at the starting line.



"It is now 0100." The 300 radio flashes the traditional "go" signal. McCarthy is on his way.

We watch for the Jerry tracers which will tell us that McCarthy has made contact.

At 0130 Force McCarthy runs into a rattlesnake's nest. House 5 spouts fire from three machine-gun positions.

DeFabbo, McCarthy's bazookaman, is spun around by a slug which rips through his shoulder. The bazooka falls among the mud and debris. Grazing fire is pouring down the road toward Carano from House 5. McCarthy's men are covered with mud by Kraut bullets ploughing the ground just in front of their tense faces.

As planned, Lieutenant Rose upon seeing the Jerry tracers engage McCarthy, starts to move north toward House 6. His formation is well spread out. One squad is on either side of the ditch. The 3d Squad is echeloned to the left rear to protect that flank. The bazooka team is be-

tween the two assault squads. Following Rose is the remainder of Force McCarthy, which, under Sergeant Fite, will move directly on House 5 as soon as Rose is fired upon.

That moment is near at hand. A stream of tracers from House 7 three hundred yards to Rose's left front jabs into the assault squads. Jerry artillery and mortar fire begin to drop near the platoon. Rose's quick decision is to close on House 6 in order to avoid the artillery. As his skirmishers near House 6, they are taken under fire by a machine gun at the southwest corner of House 5. The platoon presses onward by infiltration. Tracers from House 5 rake them. Houses 6 and 7 alternate firing one long dazzling burst after another.

From positions along the railroad track five thousand yards to our front beyond our objective, we see the sky-lighting flashes of two *Nebelwerfer* batteries. As the pro-



A patrol advancing through an Italian village . . .



Hugs the stone walls

jectiles are high into the air, their fiery comets' tails are visible for several seconds. I count fifty rockets in the air at one time. The Buck Rogers bombs crash deafeningly but harmlessly in the area over which our assault has passed. I call for counterbattery from Corps artillery but even the Long Toms can't reach the Jerry batteries.

Four German 81mm. mortars who open fire on Rose a short time later are less fortunate than the *Nebelwerfers*. Our 105s adjust on their flashes with white phosphorus, then they proceed to pour in the HE. The mortars fall silent. A drizzling rain begins to fall turning the omnipresent mud into soup. The night becomes blacker and blacker.

On Rose's left flank, his men are approaching a small concrete bridge spanning the ditch up which they have advanced.

Suddenly Crumley catches his trousers on something that rips and pulls. He throws himself face downward on the concertina wire and beckons the others to walk over his back.

"Over your back, Crumley?" asks one of the new men wonderingly.

"C'mon, for Christ's sake, do you jerks think I'm doing this for my health?"

A burst of tracers sing by from a machine-gun position under the bridge. Crumley grunts as half a dozen pairs of paratroop boots cut into his shoulders on the way across the wire.

A Kraut under the bridge tosses an egg grenade which

hits Sergeant Simmons in the eye. Now Sergeant Simmons is very angry and is persuaded with difficulty not to walk straight up to the Heinie gun and rip it out by the roots. The bazookaman draws a bead on the Kraut gun and arcs a rocket into the mud beside it. The rocket does not detonate. The next rocket does not go off either. The third one raises hell in the ditch and the Jerry gun is quiet. The bazookaman trips into the mud himself and his weapon temperamentally gives up the ghost. He heaves it into the night with a grunt.

Rose continues to advance grimly on House 6 in the face of heavy machine-gun fire. He hurls a white phosphorus (WP) smoke grenade toward the machine gun which is firing on him frontally. Under the cover of the smoke and flame his men close with the gun and grenade it.

By 0300 he is in possession of three corners of the house. The fourth is still being swept by machine-gun fire from the brick bake oven in the backyard. Grenades are running low. The bazooka is *hors de combat*. An '03 rifle with two rifle fragmentation grenades is produced. Rose directs these toward the bake oven and is rewarded with Teutonic yelps of pain. The gun ceases fire. House 6 is in our possession at 0430. All is quiet in that sector except for the crash of Kraut mortar bombs that continue to fall around the house. A stream of Kraut prisoners is carrying our wounded to the rear.

Rose throws his outposts out to await the Kraut counter-attack which is certain to come. Our troops have taken heavy casualties. Captain Boettner commits the reserve platoon.



and keeps an eye out for snipers . . .

But one man is hit as the other darts through a door.

The squads go to Rose direct, one squad moves to protect the left flank.

WHILE the action on his left is going on, Lieutenant McCarthy is in no bed of roses. He himself has been hit in the back by shell fragments. Now, as he peers over a pile of rubble and profanely makes a verbal estimate of the situation, a machine-gun bullet rips away the left side of his already battered helmet, nicking him in the forehead as it goes by. His entire platoon has now completely isolated House 5 but the Jerries inside are still firing one machine gun through the arch to the southeast. Grenade after grenade tossed through the windows and doors fail to stop the deadly staccato. McCarthy is puzzled.

The remainder of his platoon under Sergeant Fite is now moving into position to join him in attacking House 5 from the south. One of the new men is hit in the hand by machine-gun fire and drops his rifle with a howl. Over the 536 net Lieutenant McCarthy gets word to Sergeant Fite that he is pinned down by machine-gun fire from the archway. Sergeant Fite, Davis, and Machowski attempt to rush the gun, but Lieutenant McCarthy has just heaved a WP grenade which sets the brush hurdle fence in front of the house on fire. The three withdraw to the cover of a ditch. McCarthy rolls out from under the beaten zone of the machine gun while the smoke temporarily befuddles the firer.

McCarthy's decimated platoon is in a quandary. All the bazooka ammunition is gone. Grenades don't do any good. The Kraut gun behind the arch is still firing. An American

medium tank has moved in behind House 3. In vain McCarthy pleads with the tank commander to plaster House 5.

"It'll give away my position," argues the tankier.

"What the hell about my position?" shrieks McCarthy, beating his half helmet on the ground. The tank commander remains adamant.

McCarthy returns ruefully to House 5 and watches the greenish white Kraut tracers cascade from the still healthy machine gun.

Three men have muscled a captured German 20mm. gun into position near House 3 and with it they attempt to knock out the machine gun which is giving McCarthy trouble. The 20mm. has fired a score of rounds when a Jerry flat-trajectory shell from the right front knocks it for a loop. The crew is unhurt but the gun is KO'd.

To the south of the house, Privates Cyprus and Gurk are playing a cagey game. They are firing their weapons (Gurk has a BAR) from one position, then rolling like madmen to different positions and firing again to create the illusion of numbers. Gurk's BAR bags the machine gun which has been firing from the southeast corner of the house.

Private Lustritz attempts to crawl along the ditch running parallel to the south side of the house but runs into a trip wire and a Kraut antipersonnel mine wounds him seriously.

Now Sergeant Fite and Davis have worked their way up to the south wall of the house. They stand close to it for a few minutes listening. A Kraut flings two egg grenades over



Behind the front in Italy a road embankment is used to cover movement from the enemy.

the roof of the house, one of which gets Davis in the arm.

Machine-gun fire from the archway is still giving trouble. After tossing several fiery WP grenades through the arch, Metzger cautiously holds his tommy gun around the corner and empties the magazine in the direction of the Jerry machine gun. The Kraut's reply is rapid and desperate. A string of tracers neatly removes the stock from the tommy gun. Metzger withdraws the weapon while there is still some of it left. House 5 is dying hard and daylight is not far off.

From House 6 Rose's radio again begins to speak.

"Request artillery fire three hundred yards north of House 6, enemy counterattack is forming."

This message is followed quickly by another. The operator's voice is repeating slowly, enunciating each word.

"Request artillery fire on Houses 7 and 8, enemy counterattack estimated at two platoons is moving toward our left flank."

In less than five minutes the artillery liaison officer gives "on the way." We can see an inferno of flame and debris mushroom to our left front.

"That's bono," Boettner's voice over the 300 is exultant. "Do it again—I'll tell you when to stop."

For five minutes our 105s churn the air overhead. We put a call in to "Ramble Dog," the 4.2 chemical mortar company, and in a very few minutes we hear the peculiar whistle of their missiles headed for House 7.

Our little 60mm. mortars are almost red-hot.

Nothing can live through such a barrage. The Kraut withdraws leaving a score of greenish-gray objects sprawled grotesquely in the mud.

Sergeant Collins' squad has been outpostting the ditch to the north of House 6. When our barrage starts to fall, a few rounds land dangerously close. Sergeant Collins coolly withdraws his squad two hundred yards and waits for the shelling to cease. Now the barrage is over. Collins and his squad move back into position, their M1s ready for action.

Shortly before daylight a platoon from the —th Infantry arrives to relieve Lieutenant Rose's platoon around House 6. Sergeant Collins and Private Hicks are the last to leave the position. On their way south along the ditch, the sergeant suddenly halts and points a muddy forefinger toward House 7—"There they are again; look at the bastards come."

Collins slings his tommy gun on his shoulder and finds a German Mauser. Methodically the two pick off Krauts one after another until seven are lying on the ground. Four Jerries take cover in the ditch farther north. The rest execute a rapid strategic withdrawal.

Now the two advance on the Krauts in the ditch who by this time have seen enough and surrender. Shreds of dawn are creeping across the sky as Sergeant Collins, Hicks, and the four Jerries file toward the rear. The captive Jerries are carrying one of our wounded men.

The relieving force has not arrived at McCarthy's po-

sition. His men dig in and settle down for a day of shelling from Colli Laziali.

At 0930 Sergeant Fite in front of House 5, observes a white flag being poked gingerly through the south door. It is followed by a Kraut seeking an armistice with extraordinary terms. The German naïvely asks permission to remove the Jerry wounded to his own lines.

Sergeant Fite is unimpressed. He orders the Kraut down into the ditch beside him so he can get a closer look at a guy who can think up such a proposition after what has been going on in and around House 5. Sergeant Fite figures that maybe he can make this Jerry see the light by using sign language.

The day wears on. The Jerries in House 5 are still as mice. McCarthy's men can't move around the house, as Kraut artillery opens up every time they show themselves.

Well, the German lads in House 5 have had their fun. We are tired of playing with them. I call our rear echelon and get Lieutenant Shaw who commands the demolitions section.

"Shaw, make up some pole charges. Bring some bangalore torpedoes along too—and one of our flamethrowers."

Shaw is to arrive just after dark. His section will breach

the wall. McCarthy's men will pour through the hole and collar the Krauts.

Dusk is coming again. The demolitions section is standing by ready to go in.

Suddenly the ice breaks.

"House 5 has surrendered." The radio operator sings out the news in weary exultation. The demolitions section looks disappointed.

Sergeant Fite has finally succeeded in making a Christian out of the Kraut who had been with him in the ditch. The Jerry has been calling to his comrades inside to surrender. For some time there has been no reply from the depths of the shattered house. Now Sergeant Fite, Davis, and Mac-howski step warily through the yard, carefully avoiding a trip wire connected to a pull switch stuck into a Tellermine. They enter the ruined doorway, and emerge shortly with seven prisoners. One is badly wounded and is being carried in a camouflaged Kraut shelter half by his buddies.

Our objective has been won. Houses 5 and 6 are in our possession, but our casualties have been heavy. We count fifty-three of our dead and wounded.

Our front line is now 500 yards closer to Rome. We turn our faces grimly toward Houses 7, 8, 9. . . .



During a systematic shelling of the Allied Beachhead a Nazi shell hits a hotel at Nettuno.