

NAME: Justin

RANK: Second Lieutenant

ORGANIZATION: Seventh Army

OVERSEAS WARTIME SERVICE: North African and Mediterranean Theaters of Operations

- The following text is directly from an original wartime letter written by Justin. This is one of several letters from Justin in the site curator's possession and more will be transcribed in the future.
- The following text is presented under public domain provisions for educational purposes.
- No controversial material has been omitted from the following text aside from edited derogatory slurs about Italians for the protection of younger readers. No grammatical or spelling errors have been corrected.

Justin writes his parents in the United States:

“Sunday, July 25, 1943

Sicily

After quite a spell I resume my writing only from a different quarter. Your son is now in Sicily eating peaches, figs, plums and grapes. We couldn't have invaded at a better time of the year for everything is ripening.

You're all interested in knowing the details of the invasion I know; but, this time its difficult to tell you exactly what happened without appearing a bit boastful. I had a good day, thanks to your prayers for my success and safety. My men fared as I, so I'M doubly happy. Let's start from the beginning though.

You all know that we trained hard in Africa for I described those fatiguing days in previous letters. I was in the vicinity of Bone, Algeria, as you suspected in May, and from there went to Bizerte for training in ship to shore movement. I didn't care for that locality for it was dusty and hot. The Siracia, a hot wind from the Sahara, blew often and one was rarely comfortable. I did manage to visit Tunis and Carthage though and enjoyed seeing metropolitan Tunis and ancient Carthage.

In early July, final preparations and loading of ships got under way and everything gained in interest. I'm not permitted to mention types of ships and quantities but you would laugh if you could see the preparations we made right under the nose of the Axis. They knew we were there for they would describe our preparations over the radio. Still, nothing was done to stop us. Ships of all types by the hundres assembled and the troops loaded. Where the Axis airforce was I don't know but they weren't bothering us to any extent.

Then we headed out into the Mediterranean headed for ?? Speculation had been going on for months among the men and now they learned it was Sicily. We were to hit the Southern coast. Then we sat down and studied the enemy and his preparations to stop us. The beaches were well defended but we were equipped and trained for anything.

A short stop at Sousse to unlimber our muscles and then we pushed North. The Blue Waters were as rough as the North Atlantic and soon nearly all were seasick. I, too, suffered terribly and couldn't wait to get ashore. A little after midnight on the tenth of July, we were a few miles off the coast of Sicily. We didn't surprise the enemy. They were expecting us for powerful searchlights lit the beaches and the waters off-shore. We put the illumination to good use in aligning the ships and studying the beaches. After a few hours, everything was set as the Navy blew the lights into a thousand pieces and we headed in.

Some troops went in a little ahead of my gang to take care of something bothersome on our beach and we watched their progress as we headed shoreward. But for the 2nd invasion in a row, I never reached the beach as planned. Our ship hit a sandbar about 50 xxxxx yards offshore and about twenty of us had jumped off before we realized it wasn't safe for the water was well over our heads. I called back to the ship to stop disembarking and try another spot. Then I swam ashore.

When I reached the beach, there was but one other fellow with me and numerous calls for help behind us. I ordered the other fellow to get a boat laying on the beach into the surf for I was going back after the others. I pulled the boat out by swimming & found only three of them were in distress and the others were slowing making it. I swam successively to each of the three and placed them on the boat & sent it on its way. Then I swam ashore. To my complete surprise, I found that I had my pack on all that time. I can't swim that well!!

When I regained the beach I found that all the noises I had been hearing were machine gun fire and artillery. I hastily reorganized the group for a push inland but found we all lacked weapons having lost them in the water. Barbed wire covered the beaches and the enemy fire was getting more annoying. It was there I took a minute to size up the situation. The machine gun fire was no bother for it was traveling four feet above the ground. We could crawl under that. The artillery had but one gun bothering us and it was firing at 20 second intervals. So, every twenty seconds we'd be flat as it fired. I found a gap in the wire and told the men to follow me for we were going to get some W _ ps and borrow their guns. That we did. Every time one fired we could see the flash of his gun and under cover of darkness we'd walk up with a head grenade.

By the time we reached our objective three miles inland, it was daylight and all but three of us had guns. We then received orders to head back to the beach in a semicircle to attack a fort from the rear, that way holding the advance parallel to the beach.

The fort was a position on top of a hill with barbed wire and pillboxes covering all approaches for three quarters of a mile to it. It was constructed primarily for beach defense and we were going to hit it from inland. We started out.

I worked my platoon about fifty yards into the fortification by way of a ditch but we couldn't climb out of it without being mowed down. We held it while another group went to work on the pillbox that had us covered. It fell easily.

That seemed to me to be the tipoff so I jumped out of the ditch inside the first line of barbed wire and hollered 'Let's go men. They're yellow.' There were two pillboxes immediately in front of us so we went to work on them. Ten or eleven prisoners were taken there as well as two artillery pieces and a heavy calibre machine gun.

I placed ten of my men in that gun position and told them to fire the captured weapons to support the rest of us who were pushing further in. The next position fell just as easily as did the next. They were all the same—pillboxes containing machine guns. By that time, we were only 700 yards from the top of the hill and the main position.

Then came an order to withdraw. Ships offshore were scheduled to fire their guns at the position

and we couldn't get word to them soon enough to stop. Boy, I was sore for we could see the whole place crumbling under our attack. I reluctantly gave men orders to withdraw a few at a time while the rest of us fired and distracted the enemy from shooting at those pulling back. Soon there were but eight of us left to withdraw and we couldn't. The enemy was getting braver as our numbers grew smaller. Their fire was much too heavy for us to get up from the cover of a gutter we were laying in. I spotted a hole about eight feet deep about twenty yards away and told the men to get ready for we were making a run for it. Boy, every W _ p in Europe took a pop shot at us as we dashed and dove into that hole.

No sooner had we landed in the hole than the Navy opened up. Everything shook and occasionally a piece of hot lead would hit the bank and fall in on us full expended but nevertheless still hot. So there we were--- impossible to pull out and impossible to stay there. I told the men to sweat it out for wexx were attacking up the hill as soon as the fire lifted.

It lifted, and we scrambled out of the hole and pushed up the hill. Then, the amazing happened: the fort raised the flag of surrender and about three hundred Italians ran down to us with their hands up. It's funny that as long as they xxx faced on of our batallion frontly, they fought; but when eight of us worked up in back of them, they quit. I checked my eight men to see if any still lacked guns and found that two others and myself were the only ones lacking guns so we borrowed the best they had.

Then I layed down and had a drink of water. I was tired---It was after nine O'clock and I had been going steadily since half past four.

I rejoined the rest of the group who went to another spot when they withdrew to check a threat against another ----- position. I checked my men then to see how they had fared through the attack since I started them on. There were torn clothes from enemy fire on a few of them but no one drew blood. All present, all well. Boy, we were lucky!

The next few days were quiet. Then we started that drive you followed northward. In ten days, I walked a hundred miles of which sixty was covered in three days. Boy, it was rugged but we didn't stop despite our fatigue for we knew we had them on the run. One day we walked seventeen hours while another it was thirteen. Men were exhausted and kept going because it was only ten or fifteen miles further to go that day. I never say the like of it. Every man exhausted himself physically then went five or six more hours on his nerve. It was marvelous and gained results. Now, We're resting.

The American soldier really has something. His weapons are the best and his courage and will to keep going are unsurpassed.

There are many things more I could write about, but enough is enough!

Love,

Justin

P.S. By the way, I'm in perfect health."

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- Justin was killed in action later in the Second World War.
 - **For visual context, this link connects to an original wartime newsreel in the public domain that covers the above time period and Justin's organization (viewer discretion advised):**
<https://archive.org/details/ARC-38969>

- **For additional detail, this link connects to the Wikipedia article that covers the Sicilian Campaign which Justin partly describes in his letter (reader discretion advised):**
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_invasion_of_Sicily