

Frank Beckett of the 12th Artillery Company, 6th Armoured Division writes of landing in Naples on March 14th, 1944.

On the 12th March 1944 we were ordered to strike camp and prepare overseas embarking from the ports of Bone, Bizerte and Phillipville on the 13th.

We made our way across the Mediterranean sea to Italy on an uneventful voyage. Observing the Isle of Capri we landed at Naples at noon on the 14th. Many ships had been sunk in the docks but the Engineers had removed the superstructure to form landing piers. We assisted the landing of our stores and supplies from the ship eagerly watched by the civilians dressed in rags, filthy dirty, starving staring eyes and sunken cheeks. When boxes of rations split open when the landing nets took up the strain and the contents scattered on the dockside, the hungry Italians raced to pick them up and soon disappeared. Four bombs were dropped in the area but there was no damage to shipping.

We made our way to a transit camp on the outskirts of Naples close to two small villages called Cardito and Afrigola. Refuse, water and sewerage were running from the houses across the paths into an open drain in the middle of the road. It was quite evident the people were starving and many of the children were suffering from rickets. We were in tents and always had an audience of children and women when we ate our rations. One of our lads put down a tin of broken biscuits and about 30 people rushed forward, women and children knocked over by the fittest. I was giving a small girl a biscuit with marmalade on when about five people knocked me backwards into the tent. None of our lads ever ate their full rations or enjoyed the daily issue of chocolate. People were dipping into the swill bins for food and a mother gave a small child a piece of bread who bit at it like a wolf. The men folk spent their time cutting hair, selling nuts and apples and scrounging cigarettes. A small boy in the camp gave us a treat when he sang Ava Maria and Santa Lucia in a beautiful voice holding the attention of hundreds of soldiers.