

cover, watching alertly for any sign of the enemy's return. It did not seem like a retreat to the beach, more like an advance under fire towards a front line. We would cover a few yards and then have to drop flat as planes dived, on again for a few more yards, down again among the grape-vines waiting for an attack to pass, then forward once more.

The midday heat, too, was a severe test for tired, heavily laden men, and before long the heaviest equipment had to be discarded. One soldier rested for a while to play a last tune on a fine piano-accordion which he could carry no further.

We passed through a small village which the planes had machine-gunned a few minutes before. The population did not appear at all afraid, for they stood at their doors to watch us go by—men, and even women and children—in silence as a rule, but sometimes there would be a cheery word and a wave of the hand. Twice we passed homes where the whole family had turned out to form a bucket brigade, working furiously to rush cold water from the wells in their yards to the thirsty men.

It seemed as though that march would never end. All day the enemy planes were on the attack, and though the particular area in which we were was often free from their attentions they were always to be seen or heard not very far away. From time to time we had to rest, but as long as the light lasted we were constantly under fire or threat of fire.

It is important to realize that at the time it was not the actual military situation that concerned us, but the situation as we believed it to be. There may have been some considerable difference in actual fact. Even now we do not know for certain. However that may be, as those long lines of men, sweating, parched with thirst, pressed on under a burning sun, on and on, under threat of death from the air every moment of the day, this is the story that, passing from man to man, was generally believed.

That morning, when the convoy had been laboriously turned right-about, we had avoided, by the skin of our teeth, a Nazi parachute troops' ambush. Ahead of us in the darkness they had been

waiting, holding a bridge which we would have had to cross. Behind us, advance German armoured units were pouring along the road we had just travelled. The enemy land forces were behind and before, advancing nearer every moment and threatening our line of retreat to the beach.

We believed ourselves to be in a tight corner, and it seemed highly probable that desperate fighting would be necessary before the withdrawal could be completed. And always there was the Luftwaffe, hunting, harrying with machine-gun and cannon, seeking to terrify with screamers and bombs. The New-Zealander's skill at taking cover to the best advantage must have exasperated the enemy. It certainly resulted in his achieving the minimum of result for the effort expended.

As we neared our objective the illusion of approaching a battlefield became always sharper. Ahead was the thunder of bursting bombs. Every now and again a German plane could be seen swooping up and down the sides of the hills, so low that it appeared to be touching the ground, raking the valleys with fire. Over the road ahead hung a great pall of black smoke.

From a nearby field came the fierce crackle of flames telling where incendiaries had set the ripening grain crops ablaze. On the side of the road on which I was we came often across little patches



"Why do you do that?"

and lines of charred ground. The scarred sides of a large concrete culvert showed where a diving, low flying plane had sent a burst of armour piercing bullets right along its length. A low clay bank along one side of a track had been swept with fire so that there were patches and lines of churned-up earth. All along the road