

GRIM STRUGGLE FOR ORTONA IS RAPIDLY NEARING CLIMAX

Current 8th Army Thrust Depends on Success of Dominion Units

London, Dec. 14. — (CP Cable) — The grim battle for Ortona on the Adriatic coast in Italy is reaching a bitter climax as Canadians, with some fresh troops now in the line, fight yard by yard against the sternest German opposition they have yet encountered.

Fierce Attacks

The enemy is hurling fierce counter-attacks against them, using armour, infantry and concentrations of mortars, but the Canadians are slowly gaining heights overlooking Ortona. Once they are consolidated there, the fall of the coastal town is inevitable.

The Canadians replaced the famed British 78th Division which successfully stormed the Sangro river, taking its place on the right flank of the 8th Army for the Moro river attack. This was disclosed officially to-day in the House of Commons by Foreign Secretary Eden.

The whole current 8th Army thrust hinges on success of the Canadians in capturing Ortona. Fierceness of the fighting is emphasized by the fact that for nearly a week the action has been going on in a two-mile-wide strip between Moro and the lateral road leading inland from Ortona 12 miles from Orsogna.

Elements of three German divisions appear to be fighting in this area but in heavy action in muddy,

shell-pocked mud the Canadians are forcing the enemy back to the important lateral road.

Mr. Eden also disclosed that the New Zealand 2nd Division is attacking high ground on the left flank of the Canadians. This should relieve some of the pressure on the coastal sector.

Major Action

In the Canadian sector the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment from Ontario is advancing with Canadian tanks up a narrow road along the coast.

In the centre of the Canadian front are western infantry, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, the Loyal Edmonton and the Seaforth Highlanders, the advance being centred on a highway leading north from captured San Leonardo to the lateral road and then east to Ortona. They are near a junction with the lateral road now.

On the left of the westerners, Maritime province troops, presumably New Brunswick's Carleton and Yorks, who have been officially identified as in Italy, are attacking northwest of San Leonardo, and they have fought their way to within sight of the lateral road, although heavily engaged by the Germans.

This is the first major action in Italy for the Maritimers and they went into the line fresh. They have been with the Canadian formation all along, being the first battalion ashore at Reggio Calabria in September, but they have not had a real crack at the enemy since Sicily.

157-886-004

149
WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
ITALY
INVASION
CANADA
ARMY
MORO