

Ortona Threatened By Canadian Troops

Cross Bitterly-Contested Highway North of Berardi—Indians Aid in Advance

London, Dec. 16.—(CP Cable)—Leading Canadian infantry now have crossed the bitterly-contested Ortona-Orsogna highway in Italy and are in good position to bring the heaviest pressure to bear on the blazing port of Ortona on the Adriatic.

Germans Forced Back

Indian troops on the Canadian left flank also have got some infantry across the road, which now is useless to the enemy. The Germans, battered by constant shelling and weary from day and night attacks by the Canadian 1st Division and the Indian 8th Division, have been forced back into hill positions north of the highway which runs inland from Ortona to Orsogna, which is some 15 miles from the coast.

From front line reports and latest information here it appears the Canadians punched over the road at one point just north of the tiny village of Berardi, captured by French-Canadian infantry (the Royal 22nd of Quebec) and tanks.

This would indicate an effort now is being made by advance elements to get on the narrow dirt road leading northwest from the lateral highway to the town of Tollo and the next possible main defence line on the Foro river, six miles from the present battle zone.

The Tollo road is the only one the Germans can use effectively for withdrawal in this sector. Tollo lies some four miles from the Adriatic, west and a little south of Ortona.

Penetrations by the Canadians north of the Ortona road are gradually making the German position in Ortona untenable. Canadian artillery can easily shell the town and heavy mortars now can bomb it. The Royal Navy commands the sea off Ortona and will provide firm support when the final assault is

made.

The advance on Ortona is still being made over hills for the highway to the port, while denied to the enemy, is also useless to the Canadians until German guns and mortars are beaten off hills dominating the road to the north.

Bad weather is the most limiting factor in this operation, it is stated here, and the Allied air attack has been reduced by fog, which blankets the hills for hours at a time.

The battle from the Moro river to the lateral highway and beyond is being described as one of the 8th Army's hardest fights, which puts it in the category of great infantry exploits such as Mareth, the Wadi Akarit and Enfidaville, in the North African campaign.

Most stubborn opposition is coming from the German 90th Elite Division, re-formed after being wiped out in Tunisia following its long campaign in the desert wars.

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