

RUINED ORTONA BEHIND CANADIANS DRIVE NORTH

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Dead and Debris Fill Tomb-Like Streets Following Campaign's Bitterest Fighting—Other Troops Seize Key Junction, Castel Di Sangro

By GREGORY CLARK

Algiers, Dec. 29—After the most savage and protracted battle of Canadians in this war, Ortona was captured at daybreak Tuesday, when the Germans withdrew from the last outskirts of the town and backed up to fresh positions in new hills and valleys to the northward. The path of the pursuing Canadian units was densely sown with mines, and heavy fire covered the enemy retreat.

Ortona—which is on a handsome headland, was a town both ancient and modern, and is a shambles after eight days of continued street fighting, mining and heaviest artillery concentrations. The tenacious battle put up by the German paratroop rearguard has tested the Canadians in every branch of the service brought to bear on the speediest and most economical capture of the town, which was unquestionably one of the pivots of the heavily fortified and tunnelled winter line.

With most skilful use of infantry and tanks in conjunction, under deluges of concentrated artillery fire, the Canadians methodically, house by house, block by block, drove the finest picked German fighters relentlessly to the last outer fringe of the modern village and from there well back into the familiar country of hills and gulleys of the sea coast.

Proud of past performances in many different types of fighting, all officers and men are proud anew of their triumph in the kind of warfare most exhausting to soldiers in all past wars, that is slow close-in fighting from house to house.

Departure of the Germans during the early morning hours was in the coldest weather yet experienced in Italy, but which reminded the line-bucking Canadians for the first time really of December at home.

Smashing Northward

Algiers, Dec. 29—Canadian troops smashed north along the coast in snow and sleet today toward Rome's Adriatic port of Pescara.

Other Eighth Army troops captured the Apennine transport junction of Castel di Sangro, another keystone of the German defence line, in violent fighting all across Italy.

Inland from Ortona, Indian troops won new heights north of Villa Grande, and New Zealanders inched forward between Orsogna and Guardiagrele. The battle for Villa Grande may prove to be another Ortona. The village, about a mile long, contains groups of houses 300 yards apart, providing the defenders with excellent strongpoints which must be reduced one by one.

The Eighth Army blows rolled up

tacks near the mouth of the Garigliano river.

Dead Lie In Streets By DOUGLAS AMARON

With Canadian forces in Italy, Dec. 29—(CP)—The town of Ortona resembles a tomb and for many soldiers and civilians it has been just that. The dead, lying in the streets and doorways, have not yet been removed by the burial parties.

Every street in the Adriatic port of 9,000, captured Tuesday morning by Canadian troops of the First Division after a week of some of the bloodiest fighting in the Mediterranean campaign, is piled high with debris, most of which was extensively mined by the retreating Nazis.

The roar of battle has lifted from the ruins and for a few hours yesterday afternoon not even a shell landed in the street.

There were no cheering civilians to greet the Canadians in this victory for those who had remained in the town were too stunned to realize fully that the enemy was gone. Even the Canadians can't believe the battle is over.

Canadians' Bitterest Fight

The capture of Ortona has ended what has become known as the battle of Moro valley. It was the bitterest, bloodiest, most prolonged fight the Canadian soldiers have had since they entered Sicily more than five months ago.

Only the next few days will tell where the Germans make their next stand. The steep Arielli river valley, about seven miles north of the Moro, offers a natural defence line, but the Germans may try to hold the Tesoro river, 1½ miles closer to Ortona. The last German troops to leave Ortona were paratroopers, beaten back by western Canadian infantrymen and eastern Canadian tanks. Other western troops who had been guarding Ortona's southwest flank pushed through the town in hot pursuit.

Battle Raged to End By WILLIAM STEWART

With the Canadians in Italy, Dec. 29—(CP)—The battle for battered and ruined Ortona raged without a break Monday. The Germans fought with unabated fierceness but slowly were pressed back into a small group of buildings at the northern end of the town.

Monday was the same as any other day in this bitter battle—a cacaphony of machine-guns and snipers' bullets, bursts of grenades and the explosions of tank and anti-tank guns and shells.

The Germans kept shelling and mortaring the southern bulge of the town in which the Canadians were strongly established.

To the southwest of the town another Canadian force engaged parachute troops defending Ortona's flank and the ground overlooking the road leading to Pescara. Canadians there spent Monday clearing the sector across which the Germans had sent waves of troops

1

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149
WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
ITALY
INVASION
CANADA
ARMY
ORTONA

against positions occupied by Canadian Highlanders (the Seaforth Highlanders) who made a successful Christmas Eve march toward Villa Nicola and Villa San Tommaso. Both these villages are approximately 1½ miles southwest of Ortona.

Underestimated Canadians

The Germans underestimated the strength of the Canadians who had advanced with tanks supporting them over the soft muddy ground. There was violent fighting at close quarters in which the Scots wielded their bayonets with good effect.

One platoon of Germans fought right up to a Canadian company headquarters where the last of the enemy group was killed by an officer who had to use his pistol to bring the German down almost at his feet.

Another German platoon was cut to pieces when it moved directly in front of a group of Canadians waiting for them in slit trenches. Artillery fire brought down the survivors as they withdrew.

At least 100 enemy soldiers were left dead there and another 30 were taken prisoner.

Foe Brought Up 'Chutists

The fight the Canadians put up from their positions less than two miles from Ortona—along the Pescara road to which they had sent patrols—caused the enemy to bring in at least one fresh battalion of parachutists to reinforce what remained of his line beyond the Moro valley.

The Canadians also sent a force to sweep the paratroopers from the ground they held immediately southwest of Ortona and from which they had been laying down a harassing fire on the lateral road into the town.

Canadian tanks gave the infantry invaluable support in these actions. Employing tactics similar to those used in Ortona's street fighting, they blasted out the enemy machine-gun nests and upset and scattered the houses shielding them.

Flame-throwers were no deterrent to the tanks. However, the

tanks had to proceed warily because of mines and German versions of Molotov cocktails which were hurled against the tank hulls by enemy soldiers crouching in doorways.

Tanks Meet, Both Die

By RICHARD D. McMILLAN

With the Eighth Army, Italy, Dec. 26—(Delayed)—(BUP) — We were making our way along a shell-pocked trail north of Ortona where the ambulance was halted by a solemn Christmas spectacle.

Standing at attention in the pouring rain were six silent British Tommies. A figure wrapped in a greatcoat lay before them in a fresh-dug grave at the head of which stood a hooded padre, reading the burial service.

The Tommies' comrade had died in the grim Christmas struggle for the village of Villegrande, between Ortona and Orsogna.

As I watched that struggle from an observation post 500 yards south of the village, I saw the fighting rage from house to flame-seared house, held fiercely by stubborn German paratroopers. As the defenders were herded gradually to the eastern end of the village I could hear their machine-guns still chattering defiantly. Then, after a little while, the enemy fire ceased.

Going back, our driver skirted shell holes carefully, for in our ambulance was part of the price we had paid for that little village. The rest of the price was shown by rows of white crosses.

Once we came upon a strange and savage sight. On its side lay a Sherman heavy tank. Twenty feet

away, facing the Sherman, lay a German Mark IV special, also overturned, its 10-foot 75 mm. gun barrel sticking stiffly into the air. It was as if two great prehistoric monsters, meeting face to face, had refused to yield the road, and died in mortal combat.

A half-mile farther on, we heard strains of music. We got out to listen. A band was playing the carol "Christians Awake."

149
WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
ITALY
INVASION
CANADA
ARMY
ORTONA