

Ortona Pays Tribute to Canadian Dead on Moro

By WILLIAM BOSS

Ortona, Jan. 1 (CP Cable).—This Adriatic coast town, liberated by Canadian forces just over a year ago, turned out en masse Sunday at a service for the Canadians who fell in the Battle of the Moro River and the subsequent street fighting here.

Actually Ortona was freed Dec. 28, 1943, and the observance was planned for that day by Mayor Michele Albanese. However, the townsfolk petitioned for a postponement until Sunday so that more could participate.

The people of Ortona did not expect that the news of this ceremony would reach the ears of the Canadians, now fighting 190 miles northwest in the Ravenna area. It was a spontaneous expression of their gratitude for the Canadians' victory and of faith in the new way of life the victory made possible.

However, word reached Canadian Headquarters and several Canadian military men were present at the observance.

Nearly every Ortona man and many women walked in the procession from the Piazza del Castello to the Piazza Della Vittoria behind official mourners from the Italian Army, bearing two gigantic laurel wreaths. Walking with them were military and civilian Governors of Chieti Province; the town major, W. D. Banks, an Englishman who has been here since the first day of liberation, and Majors J. P. Lionel Gosselin of Quebec City; G. L.

Symmes of Toronto, and Sam Heinrich of Calgary, Canadians whose course of duty quite coincidentally brought them into the area at the time.

At Victory Square Mayor Albanese made a brief speech, after which representatives proceeded in civilian and military vehicles to the Canadian military cemetery, four miles away behind the Church of San Donato overlooking the Moro River. There are more than 1,200 graves there.

The mayor deposited one of the wreaths on a cross marking the last resting place of an unknown soldier. The cortege then returned to the town and the other wreath was laid on the grave of a civilian victim of the battle in the civilian cemetery.

Local students of Rome University had their own commemoration. Last week they produced Ortona's first newspaper, a one-sheet publication called Tragedy of Ortona. Each of the 20 contributors did a prose or poetry piece, recounting what the author did on Dec. 28, 1943 — some were in shelters, some in hospitals; one had a father and sister killed. Copies were sold to citizens and to troops billeted locally and the proceeds are to be devoted to reconstruction of the civilian hospital.

The people of Ortona intend to make this an annual event henceforth in memory of the Canadian dead. They also plan a daily service in San Donato church when it is repaired.

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