



Ortona: Canada's Epic World War II Battle

Mark Zuehlke

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A masterful retelling one of the major victories of Canadian troops over the German army's elite division during WWII.

In one blood-soaked, furious week of fighting, from December 20 to December 27, 1943, the 1st Canadian Infantry Division took the town of Ortona, Italy, from elite German paratroopers ordered to hold the medieval port town at all costs. Infantrymen serving in the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the Seaforth Highlanders, supported by tankers of the Three Rivers Regiment, moved from house to house in hand-to-hand combat amid heavy shelling and wrested the town from the grip of the fierce German defenders. Getting into Ortona had been a battle of its own. Ortona, the pearl of the Adriatic, stands on a promontory impregnable from three sides, with seacliffs on the north and east, and a deep ravine on the west. The Canadian infantrymen, drawn from virtually every corner of Canada, attacked from the south under the command of Major-General Chris Vokes, fighting across narrow gullies, mud-choked vineyards and olive groves, into the narrow streets of Ortona itself. When the vicious battle was over, 2605 Canadians were dead or wounded. But the town that had become known as "Little Stalingrad" was now in Allied hands.

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