

# YEAR FOR CANUCKS IN ITALY WAS ONE OF TOUGH FIGHTING

## Look Back on Slow, But Valuable Northward Advance of 190 Miles

(By William Boss, Canadian Press War Correspondent)

With the Canadian Corps on the Adriatic, Dec. 29.—(CP Cable)—The Canadians were catching their breath in the rubbed Adriatic seaport town of Ortona on January 1, 1944. Now, a year later, poised on the west bank of the Senio river west of Bagnacavallo, 190 miles to the northwest, they look back on a year of tough fighting. Last winter the Canadians spent three months in the mud around Ortona, they on one side of the Arielli ridge, the Germans on the other. An infantry brigade of the 5th Canadian Division—which had arrived in Italy a few months earlier to team up with the 1st Canadian Division—charged the Arielli feature January 16.

### Grand Strategy

This attack was part of the grand strategy surrounding the landings at Anzio on the Tyrrhenian sea south of Rome. The winter campaign continued static.

The Canadians moved out of the Adriatic sector late in March to be rested and retrained.

By May the Canadians were switched over near the west coast in the Cassino area. After the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade helped other Allied troops to cross the Rapido river south of Cassino, the Canadians participated in the breakthrough of the Gustav line and the approach to the Hitler line farther west barring the road to Rome. They punched ahead to the line after brisk fighting at Pignataro and Sant' Angelo in the Liri valley.

Major-Gen. Chris Vokes, of Winnipeg and Ottawa, then commander of the 1st Canadian Division, achieved a mighty victory May 23 in a single day of the most intense action and the armoured formations of Major-Gen. B. M. Hoffmeister's 5th Division poured through to exploit the victory.

The Melfa river crossing west of Aquino and Pontecorvo, where Major John (Jack) Mahony, of New Westminster, B.C., won the Victoria Cross, led to the liberation of Ceprano, Frosinone and Ferentino.

The battle-worn Canadians then went south to rest, regroup and undergo more training.

However, the 1st Armoured Brigade carried on with the British 8th Army, slugging north toward Florence. The brigade won a great battle in the Lake Trasimeno area, 90 miles north of Rome, June 26, then advanced north to the enemy's Arezzo line, a defence position based on natural features south of Florence.

The armoured brigade assaulted and cracked this line and pushed on to San Giovanni, 20 miles north of Lake Trasimene. Canadian tanks were the first to cross the Arno river into Florence on August 21, after which they continued supporting the thrust by British troops through the strong Gothic-line defences in that sector.

### Lightning Move

When it was thought that the major break-through of the Gothic line would be in the area of Florence, midway between the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian seas, the Canadian corps left its resting place to enter the line there in mid-August. But the plan was changed and the Canadians helped partisan forces to clean up that part of Florence south of the Arno river and then went back into the reserve.

In a lightning move, they next were sent to the Adriatic sector north of Ancona, 110 miles east of Florence, and just south of the Metauro river where they were poised for a thrust through the Gothic line there.

The campaign to pierce the Gothic line began with the crossing of the Metauro August 26 and within four days the Canadians faced the Foglia river, the Gothic's spine.

On the night of August 30 Nova Scotian troops attempted to exploit a foothold across the Foglia but it was smashed by enemy mines. Other units of both the 1st and 5th Divisions succeeded elsewhere and after fierce fighting for Montecchio, Polzo Alta and Monte Luro, the Gothic line's immediate defences were smashed.

There still remained the defences in depth. For the next 20 miles northwest to Rimini the Canadians slugged in bitter ridge-to-ridge battles. The ridge-top town of Coriano was taken by an infantry brigade from Gen. Hoffmeister's division.

This enabled the Canadians to force the Marano river and the crossing was followed by bitter fighting for San Martino, San Lo-

renzo and the rumini airport on the right flank. These taken, brilliant tactics obtained positions around San Fortunato, "the worst ridge of all."

### Slaughter Mark

The heaviest air support of the Italian campaign plus Canadian artillery fire reduced the Germans holding the ridge southwest of Rimini in a high-water slaughter mark for the year. More than 750 prisoners were taken there.

Rimini itself fell September 21 to Greek troops under Canadian command and the Canadian Corps hit the Lombardy plains country the same day the autumn rains came.

Nevertheless the Canadians pushed on, crossing the Rubicon river, reaching first Sant Arcangelo and then Savignano, on the Rimini-Bologna lateral highway. From there it has been a succession of bridgeheads—over the Flumicino, the Pisciatello, the Savio, where Pte. Ernest (Smokey) Smith, of New Westminster, won his V.C., the Ronco, and the Bevano, where the Canadians came out of the line for another rest—with the towns of Cesena and Forlimpopoli on the Rimini-Bologna highway to their

credit. Cesena fell October 20 and Forlimpopoli October 25.

Returning to action December 1, the Canadians again achieved striking successes. Within 72 hours of breaking out from the Montone river bridgehead, they had liberated the ancient city of Ravenna and were busy mopping up the triangular area between the Lamone river, route 16 running northwest near the coast, and the Montone river.

After an unfortunate attempt to cross the Lamone river December 5 and a pause for planning a new thrust, the Lamone was crossed in force against determined resistance December 10. The Canadians also crossed the Vetro and Vecchio canals, reaching the Naviglio canal in their difficult westward push over the water-laced flatlands toward the Po delta.

### Mighty Effort

A bridgehead was thrown over the Naviglio December 12 and next day the Germans counter-attacked 13 times in nine hours. General Sir Richard McCreery, 8th Army commander, congratulated the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, of Picton, Ont., and the Carleton and York Regiment, of St. Stephen, N.B., for stopping the enemy.

The corps burst out in a mighty effort December 21 and in the subsequent intense battle the Germans cracked under terrific pressure, withdrawing to the Senio river, quitting Bagnacavallo, nine miles west of Ravenna, and leaving only pockets of resistance behind east of the Senio.

The corps fought under three commanders during the year—Lieut-General Crerar, who later became a full general commanding the 1st Canadian army in Europe; Lieut-Gen. E. L. M. (Tommy) Burns, of Westmount, Que., and Lieut-Gen. Charles Foulkes, of London, Ont.

General Burns took over the corps after General Crerar went to Britain in March to prepare the Canadians for the invasion. In December, General Burns, who was transferred to the western front to be general officer commanding Canadian lines of communication, was succeeded by General Foulkes.

Early this month General Foulkes was succeeded as 1st Division commander by Major-Gen. Harry Wickshire Foster, of Winnipeg and Picton, Ont.

General Hoffmeister, who comes from Victoria, B.C., continued to lead the armoured division.

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