

153-004-029

Only German Dead Left In Shambles of Ortona

By DOUGLAS AMARON

With the Canadians in Italy, Dec. 30 (CP).—The ruins of Ortona are firmly in Canadian hands, cleared of the enemy who had turned its streets into a battlefield, its houses into bristling fortresses.

The Germans quit the town, where day and night battles had been raging for a week, early Tuesday morning. They left behind them, in the rubble of what once were buildings, only their mines, booby traps, and their dead.

By Tuesday night the fighting had moved north along the Ortona-Pescara Road, where Western Canada infantry are pursuing the retreating enemy. Other Westerners to whom belongs the honor and credit for driving the Germans from Ortona are getting their first rest in seven days.

The end of the Ortona battle and with it the end of the three-weeks fight for the Moro River Valley came suddenly and unexpectedly. The Germans fought stubbornly, almost fanatically, right up to Monday night. Then they quit; obviously on orders.

An Italian civilian told the commander of one Canadian battalion at 7 a.m. that the Germans were gone. The colonel of another Canadian battalion learned a few hours later the battle was over when a signaller reported that the only Germans left were dead.

There was only sombre rejoicing at the end of this fight. Civilians left in the town were too dazed to realize the enemy had gone; the Canadians were almost inured to bullets and shells, and too tired to care.

I entered the town at noon Tuesday not knowing the battle was over. A provost who stopped our jeep and advised me to walk in didn't know it either. There was a halt in the artillery and mortar barrage which has become part of the daily life on this front, but we took it to be just a pause.

"The Germans are probably having lunch," quipped Capt. Placide Labelle of Montreal, press conducting officer.

Signs of heavy fighting were evident even on the outskirts of the town. A dead German lay by the side of the road.

Scene of Desolation.

Within the town there was a scene of desolation such as no other town of this area presents. San Leonardo, smashed by shellfire and bombs, still has more serviceable houses than Ortona though only a fraction of its size.

In one of the town's main squares, the Piazza San Francisco D'Assisi, were two dead civilians. On the far side of the square Canadian Pioneers were removing bodies from a shot-up building.

This square is one of many which Canadian tanks helped to clear and some of the men who did the job were still there, standing by their Shermans, wondering if the battle was really over.

They were Trps. J. N. Lounsbury of Winnipeg, W. H. Johnson of Kenora, Ont., Thomas Lewis of Edmonton, H. R. Chenoweth of Bralorne, B.C., Joe Heys of St. Lambert, Que., and Lieut. G. W. Anderson of Toronto. With them was Pte. Wallace Cook of Peace River, Alta., who was looking for mines and booby traps.

These men didn't want to talk of their experiences—not just then. Their minds and memories were too

Election Results By Special Phones

The Globe and Mail will give Toronto election results Saturday night from 8 o'clock until midnight over six special telephone lines:

WAverley 7228 ELgin 4792
WAverley 7225 ELgin 4789
WAverley 1320 ELgin 4791

Use only these numbers, as election information will NOT be given through WAverley 7851, the editorial switchboard.

full of what had happened for them to have a clear picture of any one incident.

They knew, though, that the Germans had used a hospital across the street from where they were standing as a position for snipers although patients were still in the wards. They said the dead were still in the streets because it had not been safe to go out to remove them.

Left Suicide Squad.

Civilians in the square were shot by the Germans at night, they said. The Germans shot at every sound, not caring whether it was made by an Italian or a Canadian.

"We've been shooting up buildings ever since we hit the edge of this town at the beginning of the battle," said one trooper. "We had to do it on account of snipers. They were a suicide squad in the town, remaining even behind our lines, even though they knew they could never get out alive."

Anderson said the Ortona fight was contrary to the rules and regulations of tank warfare.

The tanks went through the narrow streets in advance of the infantrymen and so close to the buildings the Germans could reach their arms out of windows and drop grenades or magnetized "beehives." Even at night the tanks remained in the town in preference to withdrawing to the safer outskirts.

An infantryman, Staff Sgt. D. W. Haney of Sarnia, carrying a rifle over his shoulder, was twirling an Italian fencing sword in his hand. It and some Italian flags were his souvenirs of the battle.

He told of a member of his unit who had been rescued a few hours earlier from the ruins of a building where he had been buried since Christmas Day. He had been there without food and water, but emerged in good condition except for a fractured pelvis.

A number of other Canadians were buried at the same time. The soldier, who was later rescued, talked to them until, one by one, they ceased to reply. They all had died.

Hardest Battle.

Lieut. J. R. V. Carr-Harris of Kingston, Ont., whose platoon of sappers worked with the infantrymen all through the battle, was setting off on another job—to build a bridge on the northern side of the town.

These Canadians had been through the toughest fighting of the war. They pushed back the best soldiers the Germans could put into the line. They beat men who were under orders to fight until death or the last bullet was gone.

These Canadians were proud of their victory, but that night they were tired. They wanted sleep, and, because of their victory, they knew they would get sleep.

149
WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
ITALY
INVASION
CANADA
ARMY
ORTONA