

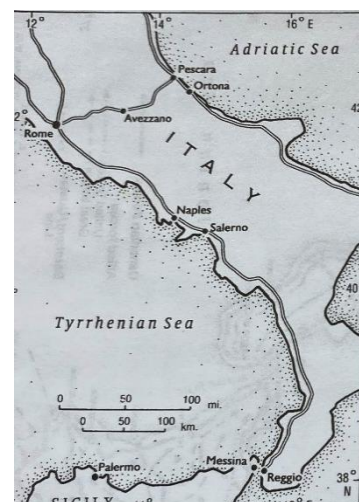
BATTLE SUMMARY – 1943 – ORTONA

Conflict	WW2 – Italian Campaign	Dates	20 – 27 Dec 1943
Location	East coast of Italy, roughly opposite Rome		
“Metro” Area	~1 sq km	Urban Core	~0.5 sq km
Pre-War Pop	10,000, many fled before the battle	CivPop Losses	1314 (but covers several months)
Attacker	Canadians	Defender	Germans (paras)
- Strength	Bde (inc Tk Sqn, AT Bty)	- Strength	~ 1 to 2 bn, no tanks
- Losses	108 killed, c. 191 wounded, 3 Shermans.	- Losses	~ 40 killed, ~ 175 wounded or missing

The Canadians believed that the Gustav line, the last defensive line before Rome was anchored at the Arielli River, N of Ortona. When resistance was encountered in the old coastal hilltop town of Ortona it was seen as a minor defence and 2nd Canadian Inf Bde was sent to clear it with one Bn (Loyal Edmonton), whilst 1st Canadian Inf Bde remained the main effort trying to bypass the town to the left. From the first advance on 20 Dec resistance was stronger than expected. By the evening of 21 Dec the Canadians were at the edge of the town proper. By the evening of the 22nd it became obvious from the ferocity of the defence that the town was the eastern



anchor of the Gustav line and so a 2nd battalion (the Seaforths), backed by additional tanks from the Three Rivers Regiment were committed to the fight. The town was an ancient one with very narrow streets and solidly built brick and stone buildings. One two routes through the town were wide enough for tanks and the Germans had demolished buildings and created rubble piles to channel the Canadians into kill zones – particular in the 6 large squares spread through the town. The battle was very much conducted by the company commanders in a combined arms fight, with Shermans and 6pdr guns supporting the infantry building by building. The Germans made extensive use of booby traps, mines and snipers, and flame-throwers were seen on a few occasions. The battle is particularly remembered as it included Christmas Day 1943, when the Seaforths laid on a Christmas “banquet” in an old church. By the 27th December the Germans had decided to abandon the town and the whole of the remaining German defenders escaped through the large railway tunnel to safety on the night of 27/28 Dec.



Sources	<p>Geroux, J. (2021). Italian Stalingrad: The Battle of Ortona. [Podcast] Interview with J. Spencer. Urban Warfare Podcast. USA: Modern Warfare Institute. Available at: https://mwi.usma.edu/italian-stalingrad-the-battle-of-ortona/</p> <p>Geroux, J. (2021). The Urban Battle of Ortona. Masters Thesis. Canada: University of New Brunswick. Available at: https://unbscholar.lib.unb.ca/islandora/object/unbscholar%3A10433</p> <p>Gooderson, I. (2008). Assimilating Urban Battle Experience – The Canadians at Ortona. Canadian Military Journal, Winter 2007-2008. Canada: National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. Available at http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vo8/no4/doc/gooderso-eng.pdf</p> <p>Spencer, J. and Geroux, J. (2022). Case Study #5 – Ortona. [Online]. Urban Warfare Project. Available at: https://mwi.usma.edu/urban-warfare-project-case-study-5-battle-of-ortona/. Contemporary video and audio also available on YouTube – search "battle of ortona" (contemporary audio)</p>
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Wargames	Chiavini, R. <i>Christmas in Hell</i> . [Game]. Canada: High Flying Dice Games. Available at: http://www.hfdgames.com/ortona.html
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Topic	Notable Issues/Lessons
Urban Geography	Old town, brick and stone, mostly ~4 storey buildings. A few large buildings, especially churches. Very narrow streets, regular grid in S, more irregular in older NE part.
3D Structure	Lots of rubble. 6pdrs could be manhandled over the rubble and even on to the upper floors of buildings. Tanks and 6pdrs used to blast away rubble piles.
Command and control	Operated mostly at the coy level. The two Bn HQs seemed to stay back, but daily visits to coy cmdrs. Bde cmdr also daily visits to bn cmdrs.
Movement	Large amounts of rubble from prior bombardment and use of large calibre weapons in the fight. Germans used rubble to canalise troops, and tanks were already canalised by the narrow streets. By 23 rd Dec had (re)learnt the art of mouseholing and vertical assault (from above) to minimise casualties in the street and in entry.
Combined Arms	Extensive and continuous use of combined arms, with typically 1-2 tanks per coy, and 1-2 6pdrs, and an engr det.
Direct Fire	Extensive use of HE. AP used to punch hole and then HE put through the same hole to kill defenders. Also stand-off arty support in direct fire role against further parts of the town.
Damage	Extensive destruction by direct and indirect HE of most buildings, including heritage sites such as cathedrals/churches/schools – leading to large amounts of rubble.
Assault	See mouseholing above. Some use of flamethrowers by the Germans.
Indirect Fire	Limited use after initial bombardment by the Canadians due to small size of the area and danger to own troops. Germans able to use the large railway tunnels and cellars for protection. Continuous use of Arty and Mortars by Germans.
Air Support	None until a few sorties as part of the evacuation deception plan on 27 Dec.
Engineers	Extensive use to clear rubble piles, mines and booby traps. Dets with each coy.
CEMA	Minimal. Some radio intercept about “Operation Ortona” on 26/27 Dec but interpreted as a counter-attack/reinforcement, not the withdrawal plan.
Morale	Significant issue due to Christmas. Seaforths pulled back by coy for banquet, but Loyal Eddies supplied forward with extra rations. Some JNCOs refused to let their soldiers move back due to the unnecessary risk, and some were indeed killed on way to/from the dinner. German morale seems to have been strong throughout, with exhortations from Hitler to defend, but local Div/Corps commanders taking a realistic view and the railway tunnels providing a safe exit route.
Civilians	~N1000 stayed in the town, mostly hiding in cellars until the Canadians liberated them. Provided some distraction/extra call on resources whilst moved to a safe place and inhibited Canadian use of Fires.
Subterranean	Germans made use of tunnels beneath the houses to infiltrate and exfiltrate as the Canadian advanced. Canadians only realised on 27 th when they started to close off the tunnels. The big railway tunnel provided a safe haven from bombing for both Germans and the civilian population.
Other Notable	Extensive use of boobytraps, particularly on “attractive” items (from SS Daggers to toilet chains!). Mining whole buildings and bringing them down once occupied by enemy troops.

(need to reference explicitly?)