

# **A WAR OF THEIR OWN**

## **The Canadians in Sicily and Italy**

**Part I: Sicily to Ortona**

**Part II: The D-Day Dodgers**

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**For:  
The War Amps of Canada**

**Duration: 2 hours**

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# PART I: SICILY TO ORTONA

## Introduction

**H.C. Chadderton:** A video on the Canadians in Sicily and Italy – this is a difficult challenge. The official war maps show more than 3,500 place names where our troops were engaged during the almost two years of steady fighting. In this production, it is possible only to incorporate the main battles. The regiments in Italy faced tremendous odds never before experienced by the Canadian Army. These guys had to learn the hard way and they developed innovative techniques to fight in an inhospitable terrain against a hardened and experienced enemy force. That's why we call this video ***A War of Their Own***.

Doc Buckley, he was a friend of mine, I met him in training. He was a medical officer who was injured in a parachute drop early in the war. He was unable to return to his combat unit and was posted to a military headquarters. He served throughout the campaign in Sicily and Italy.

Now Doc kept a written record in the form of letters to his father, who happened to be a World War One veteran. In them, he gave perspectives of the war at large, as well as an insight into the human suffering and, of course, he talked of the achievements of the ordinary soldier. We rely largely on Buckley's letters to tell this story.

# On Board Troopship

## July 9, 1943

**Doc Buckley:**

*"Dear Dad,*

*Today we left for destinations unknown. The barrack rumours all said it was Sicily. I knew the secret as I was in on the staff meetings. Halfway across, the troops were given the news. They were right. It is Sicily.*

*The idea came from Winston Churchill himself. When he travelled to Moscow in August of 42, he argued with Joseph Stalin, who wanted an immediate invasion of France. Churchill apparently told Stalin that the first attacks should be carried out in the Mediterranean area.*

*Churchill said that it was better to attack the soft belly of the crocodile than its hard snout. The strategy seems to focus on grabbing Sicily and Italy to protect the Mediterranean and make the Germans commit troops to reinforce the Italian front.*

*I will have to get used to my new position as a Medic, but I look forward to doing my part. My job will be to estimate casualties.*

*Take care Dad, love to Mom.  
Your loving son,  
Norm"*

# Operation Husky – The Invasion of Sicily

**H.C. Chadderton:** Operation Husky was the largest amphibious assault in the war to that date. The Canadians joined an allied invasion army of three thousand ships and landing craft, all under the protection of more than two thousand aircraft. It was the first major operation for the Canadian soldiers since the infamous Dieppe Raid in 1942.

The First Canadian Infantry Division landed on the south shores of Sicily on July the 10<sup>th</sup> of 1943. They were part of General Montgomery's famed British Eighth Army. Their objective: The air field at Pachino.

The infantry battalions that took part? Well, there was the Royal Canadian Regiment mostly from London, Ontario; Toronto's 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders, and the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, recruited mostly from around Belleville, Ontario. That was the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade came from Western Canada. It consisted of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and Vancouver's Seaforth Highlanders.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was made up of the famous Royal 22<sup>nd</sup>, or Van Doos, from Quebec, New Brunswick's Carleton and York Regiment and the West Nova Scotia Regiment.

These famous infantry regiments were supported by the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Tank Brigade. That included the Calgary Regiment, the Ontario Regiment and the Three Rivers Regiment of Quebec.

The landing went off as planned and the opposition, mostly from Italian troops, was light.

# Grammichele

## July 15, 1943

**Doc Buckley:**

*"Dear Dad,*

*We have been in Sicily for a week or so now and there are already great stories circulating about the Canadians.*

*The first battle with the enemy was at Grammichele. Our Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment with Three Rivers Tanks ran into the Germans around July the 15<sup>th</sup>. Grammichele was taken when two companies of the Hasty P's outflanked the town and the Germans began withdrawing. We suffered 25 casualties.*

*In this battle, Huron Brant, a Mohawk Indian from Deseronto, Ontario, proved to be a one-man wrecking crew. He single-handedly attacked a group of thirty Germans. He has been recommended for the Military Medal..."*

**H.C. Chadderton:**

After Grammichele, the Canadians had to tackle the toughest objectives; they were in the middle of mountainous Sicily. They included names like Valguarnera, Assoro and Leonforte.

# Valguarnera

## July 18, 1943

**H.C. Chadderton:** The first to set out towards Valguarnera was the West Novas, with the Carleton York's and the Royal 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment following. The Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, mostly a peacetime regiment, fired their first real barrage in support of this attack.

**Doc Buckley:** *"...Ross Munro, the Canadian war correspondent over here, visited our medical headquarters. He showed me his dispatch and I copied down some of it. They are moving words..."*

**Ross Munro:** Behind the barrage came the Carleton's, little clusters of men in dusty khaki moving cautiously forward and then running and falling flat as they took cover. Some men were hit and fell and didn't move. The others couldn't stop, and kept going, firing, dodging, creeping, sweating, forward.

**H.C. Chadderton:** Meanwhile, the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, positioned along the road below Valguarnera, came under heavy mortar and artillery fire and were forced to withdraw. The Royal Canadian Regiment managed to gain control of the southern approach to the town. Then the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders, or the Glamour Boys, so named because they hailed from metropolitan Toronto, launched a final approach and Valguarnera was in Canadian hands by the night of July the 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Doc Buckley:** *"Dear Dad,*

*The terrain in Italy is treacherous. Steep cliffs and ravines are slowing the soldiers down. Apparently the maps are so bad that you have to rely on your compass and your gut feelings. I can't imagine what it must be like; inching along in this dreadful heat and choking dust, exposed to enemy fire. My God Dad, where do they get the courage?*

*These modern weapons are much different than the ones you used. The PIAT, an anti-tank gun, is a cumbersome thing that looks like a stove pipe. It fires a projectile that can burn a hole through the armour of a tank. The Hasty P's were probably the first Canadian regiment to use the PIAT. Some brave guy in the Hasty P's, we call them plough jockeys as they come largely from the farming lands in the Belleville area, knocked out a German half track with one at Valguarnera.*

*I also hear the boys talking about the German 88's - they are held in tremendous awe and, of course, some fear and trepidation..."*

## Assoro & Leonforte

## July 22, 1943

### H.C. Chadderton:

The battle for the twin towns of Leonforte and Assoro was as bloody as it gets. The towns are perched two miles apart on a long, steep ridge. Leonforte was near the ruins of an ancient castle high on a cliff blocking the Brigade's objective of Assoro. The advance to take this mountainous terrain started around midnight. The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade was assigned the task of taking Assoro.

One of the company commanders in the Hasty P's was Major Lord Tweedsmuir; he was the son of a former Governor General of Canada. He led the attack on Assoro, climbing the sheer face of this cliff where only scrub and goat tracks offered a foot hold. Now, by climbing the hill, the Canadians had achieved complete surprise. They were able to fire on the Germans in the village of Assoro below.

One of the stories going around was that Major Tweedsmuir, saddled a radio onto the back of a mule. The radio made it to the top, the mule dropped dead. However, instructions could then be passed to the guns in the rear, and the 25 pounders fired with devastating effect on the German positions.

Around the same time, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment was fighting a vicious street battle in Leonforte, which was defended by German tanks and by troops from two battalions. The Eddies were trapped. Our artillery could not shell the place because it was impossible to tell which buildings were held by the Canadians. Our tanks couldn't cross the ravine. Under the constant fire and in the dark, engineers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Company built a portable Bailey bridge across a 50 foot gap. Captain Rowan Coleman of the PPCLI loaded his men onto tanks from the Three Rivers and roared across the bridge to the rescue. Coleman was awarded the Military Cross for his actions. Incidentally, he was very well known, because at that time, his father was the head of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

## Nissoria

### July 24, 1943

**Doc Buckley:**

*"Dear Dad,*

*I just got a first hand report today from a friend of mine who was in the Battle at a place called Nissoria, in Sicily. Apparently the plan was ill-conceived and the Major, who told me the story, blamed it on General Simonds who insisted on a creeping barrage. He noted that Simonds was a former gunner.*

*The RCRs were to follow up on the barrage, supported by the tank unit of the Three Rivers Regiment. The RCRs got into Nissoria but, as they went forward, German mortars and machine gun fire devastated them. The Sherman tanks continued on, but without the infantry protection, 10 tanks were lost. This proved just how vulnerable these 37 ton vehicles are. They catch fire easily and have been given the nickname "Ronson," after a cigarette lighter. The armour is too thin and their guns are not big enough to engage in a duel with the Germans and their crack 88 artillery.*

*The push through Nissoria was finally a success, clearing the way for the capture of Agira..."*

# Agira

## July 24-28, 1943

**H.C. Chadderton:** Next, I will try to piece together for you the fighting for Agira that was between the 24<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of July. The main objective was a small mountain, it was the task given to the Seaforths.

The RAF, which included a lot of Canadians, were flying above in a tactical role. They gave the area a good strafing with their fighter bombers.

Eventually, the Seaforths had to scale a 300-foot cliff. In doing this, they took the enemy by surprise. Agira fell to the Patricia's two days later, on the 28<sup>th</sup>. They captured 43 Germans. This ended the First Division's biggest fight of the Sicilian campaign. What was supposed to have been a one-day battle had dragged on for five, and cost the Canadians 438 casualties.

**Doc Buckley:** *"...It's the PBI, the Poor Bloody Infantry; the gunners, the combat engineers; that is the "other ranks," who fight the war. Being around headquarters, I hear the Generals talking about their commanders.*

*Canadians are fighting under General Sir Harold Alexander with the divisional commander being Guy Simonds. We were visited by no less than General Montgomery himself, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten and the American General, Dwight Eisenhower..."*

**H.C. Chadderton:** War correspondent Ross Munro sent this dispatch:

**Ross Munro:** Canadians have been at full scale war for weeks now. Sicily is a dirty business and I am continually amazed at how these young kids, many of them just out of high school, place their fear aside. They are up against the experienced Germans who are using flame throwers, sub machine guns, the spandaus, a sort of heavy machine gun which our troops seem to fear most, backed up by gun fire from their superior tanks and, obviously the most effective weapon in this war: the German 88 on half tracks. They tell me the 88 has the accuracy of a sniper's rifle.

According to one captured German officer, his men have high praise for the Canadians, whom they recognize by the red patches on their sleeves. "Other troops lay down and take shelter when our mortars are fired," he said, "but the Red Patches keep coming. The Red Patches are devils."

**Doc Buckley:** *"...This campaign has proved that Canadians are showing their proclivity for inventiveness. When the 1<sup>st</sup> Division was still in England, Chief Engineer, Brigadier Geoff Walsh, demanded samples*

*of every type of German mine which the British had come across. He then set his engineers to the task of learning how to defuse them. His inspiration paid off because mines have proved to be a weapon with which the Germans are very adept. They cleverly plant these devices under the soil and gravel, particularly where the assault vehicles will go.*

*The infantry and the scout cars have learned to spot the signs and the engineers come up and disarm the mines, saving many lives..."*

## Sicily – Final Phase

**H.C. Chadderton:** Ross Munro, who was my boss at the Canadian Press before the war, gave me access to his notes. Here is one:

**Ross Munro:** I am still trying to put together in my mind the final phases of the Canadians' battle in Sicily. As I write, I note that Mussolini, the Italian leader, was deposed by the Italians on July the 25<sup>th</sup>. If anyone thought this would affect the opposition, they were wrong. The Germans seem quite determined to defend Italy.

While the Americans were mopping up in the Western and most Northern parts of Sicily, our war diaries talk about a number of really difficult battles, like Regalbuto. It had been held by the Hermann Göring Division.

Montgomery, the British general who beat the Germans in North Africa, told the Canadians after Sicily that he was proud to have them in his famous British Eighth Army.

### Montgomery Newsreel Clip:

*"...that the people in Canada, in your home country, will know how proud they should be of what you have done here, fighting overseas. I regard you now, as one of the veteran divisions of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, just as good as anyone else, if not better."*

**Peter Stursberg:** *This is Peter Stursberg of the CBC reporting from the Straits of Messina. The Canadians are whistling and humming a new tune as they drive along the coastal road of Sicily toward the loading beaches, or as they march along the steep tracks across this narrow stretch of water in Italy. Most of them don't know the words to it and quite a few don't even know its name. But it keeps running through their heads, this catchy melody, which has become the song of the Mediterranean theatre of the war.*

**H.C. Chadderton:** So, how does the song go? Underneath the lamplight . . . You remember, you've all heard it. But no story of the Allies in Italy is complete without mentioning the song Lilli Marlene. The boys here heard the Germans singing it. Some enterprising Brits translated the words and, on a clear night, they tell me, you could hear the same song being sung from the slit trenches on both sides. It is a poignant lyric, a soft sentimental melody. And it has persisted throughout the years.

### English lyrics of Lili Marlene

*. . . my own Lilli Marlene.  
Time would come for role call, time for us to part.  
Darling, I caress you and press you to my heart.*

*And there 'neath that far off lantern light,  
I hold you tight, we kiss goodnight.  
My Lilli of the Lamplight, my own Lilli Marlene.*

**Doc Buckely:**

*"Dear Dad,*

*I'm at Messina. Across the strait I can see the Italian mainland. An invasion is imminent. The question is, will the Germans offer any determined resistance to a landing near the toe of Italy? Not even General Simonds seems to have an answer.*

*I went on rounds at the hospital here. The medical records show tropical diseases these boys never counted on when they enlisted, like jaundice and dysentery. Looking at my records today, we have nearly 1,200 cases of malaria. And imagine, boys from western battalions being stung by scorpions! We even have a disease over here which is not in my medical books called sandflea fever. It is tragic to see our troops suffering, not from wounds, but from the terrible conditions of Sicily..."*

# On Board the HQ Ship Crossing the Messina Straits

## September 3, 1943

**Doc Buckley:**                   *“September 3, 1943*

*Dear Dad,*

*The offensive in Italy has begun. As I write, Canadian soldiers have already landed on Italy’s shore. Tracers lit up the night sky and thick smoke filled the air, you could barely see. This assault across the Messina Straits saw all of the Canadian services working together; soldiers, artillery, fighter planes, and the navy. It was an exceptional display.*

*As we leave Sicily’s coastline, I remember the men who stay behind, casualties of the 38 days of action there. Who knows how many more months lay ahead?*

**Ross Munro:**

The Canadians are re-inventing warfare. The old British tactics are no good here. World War One tactics won’t work, start a creeping barrage and have the troops follow it along. Colonel Cy Neroutsos of the Calgary tanks is being credited as the first inventor of a new way to fight: the jock column, which is essentially a mobile force.

He had been given the job of exploring a long road to see what was ahead. He took his own tanks, sent some scout cars ahead, added a few mortars, machine guns and anti-tank guns, filled in with any other kind of armoured vehicle he could find, loaded on the infantry and said “Lets go.” They’d get some 60 miles and end up on what was really a treacherous goat track. Booby-trapped road blocks would have to be dismantled. Call up the engineers.

We have a new form of Canadian bridging too. Usually the Brits construct what they call Bailey bridges out of portable girders. Sometimes the Canadians can’t wait, so they construct what they laughingly call an Irish bridge. Armoured bulldozers push a bunch of stones into a creek, wide enough to hold the tracked vehicles and across we go.

**Doc Buckley:**                   *“Dear Dad,*

*How about the RCAF in this theatre? I seldom get to see any airmen, but just the other day, a squadron leader from the RCAF 331 Wing dropped by the hospital to see a friend. I heard the story of not only 331 Wing but also the 420, City of London, 424, City of Hamilton and 425, Alouette Squadron. They were repeatedly bombing in Sicily and across the straits of Messina. Along with the bombers, our fighter*

*pilots were doing themselves proud. The Canadian Spitfire squadron in the area was 417 from the City of Windsor.*

*Well, you'll have seen in the newspapers that Italy signed an armistice on September the 3<sup>rd</sup>. This makes for a very strange situation. We don't really see any lessening of the war, though, because the Germans seem to be fighting as hard as ever, and not missing their Italian allies.*

*The other big news is the Quebec conference. From what we hear our own Prime Minister MacKenzie King got to be the host but as usual Churchill for the British and Roosevelt for the Americans did all the talking. I can only guess, but the topic must have been about when to invade France. As far as the Canadians here are concerned, the main war effort will still be Italy."*

**Roosevelt Newsreel Clip:**

*"We are celebrating the brilliant victory won by British and Canadian and American fighting men in Sicily. We have arrived harmoniously at certain definite conclusions. Of course, I am not at liberty to disclose just what these conclusions are but, in due time, we shall communicate the secret information of the Quebec Conference to Germany, Italy and Japan."*

# Campobasso

## October 14, 1943

**Doc Buckley:**

*"Dear Dad,*

*Our soldiers have a new nickname, "Monty's Mountain Goats," because they seem to be frequently stuck up in the hills. The mountains of Italy make natural fortresses; which is favourable for the defenders and denies use of the roads.*

*The Germans dictate how this war is going to be fought. If they decide to fortify a town, knowing our troops can't get around it, then we have to attack. That's what happened in the fight for Campobasso.*

*According to my diary, October the 1<sup>st</sup>, was the date that a jock column, which included the Calgary tanks and the RCRs set out to Motta. Motta needed to be secured before the troops could advance to Campobasso in the Apennines Mountains.*

*The Germans put up a tough fight and layed on their usual delaying tactics; blown bridges and heavily-mined roads. At one point, our men were pinned down under heavy machine gun and shell fire. Because the Germans had such an excellent vantage point, one of their anti-tank guns managed to knock out six of our Shermans, one after the other.*

*Campobasso itself was successfully captured. There wasn't much of a fight for it. The Germans had pulled out. Nonetheless, it has proved rewarding for the troops. They've turned it into a popular recreation centre. It's called Maple Leaf City..."*

# The Sangro River

## November 17 – December 1, 1943

**H.C. Chadderton:** Next, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army planned to launch a major offensive across the Sangro River, upon which the Germans based their formidable Winter Line. This was their main defensive position below Rome. In preparation for this, The Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was assigned the task of clearing the Germans from the near side of the Sangro. Just moving the 60 miles from Campobasso to the Sangro was an engineering triumph. The Germans had destroyed every bridge, every culvert along the road and they had dynamited overhanging cliffs to cause land slides.

**Matthew Halton:** *This is Matthew Halton, of the CBC, speaking from Italy. Today on the Sangro River, I saw a battle being fought as we dreamt of fighting our battles through hard gruelling years, that is, with overwhelming superiority in firepower. It was a spectacular thing. Every half hour, a full squadron of our medium bombers went over to unload their bombs on German positions, on the high escarpment two miles beyond our OP. Our fighter bombers went over 20 times, dive bombing, and a dozen times our fighters strafed the enemy positions. Whole batteries of our 25 pounders and mediums were blasting away at the enemy. With all this firepower, we should be stunning the enemy, but it's still hard. And between us and Rome, there are still fourscore miles and many demolitions and lots of dirty little jobs for the infantry. Always at the last, that job has to be done by fighting men in the face of machine gun bullets.*

**H.C. Chadderton:** By December the 1<sup>st</sup>, we had been in the Italian Campaign less than six months; the 8<sup>th</sup> Army had broken the Germans' Winter Line on the Adriatic and forced the defenders back to the Moro River.

**Doc Buckley:** *"November, 1943*

*Dear Dad,*

*Winter is upon us. Some change from the heat of Sicily! The Canadians have been in action nearly six months. What a tremendous record.*

*I must tell you how the reason for the Italian campaign has changed. You will remember that one of the ideas for sending Allied and Canadians troops to Italy in the first place, was to placate Stalin. After Campobasso, another reason has become paramount. The Germans have apparently decided to defend Italy south of Rome and have built two heavily fortified positions to stop us, The Gustav Line and The Hitler Line.*

*I saw an intelligence report today. The Germans have nearly twice as many divisions as the Allies. This means, if there is going to be a Second Front across the Channel sometime in the future, the troops in Italy will be keeping a lot of German divisions occupied; hence there will be fewer of them to oppose any landing in France. As one Canadian General summed it up, "The Italian campaign has been given its raison d'être"*

*It's great to have a real reason but I don't envy the boys in the forward positions. It means they will have to continue to fight in adverse weather conditions, in strenuous terrain, against an enemy who is well supplied, skilful and very strong.*

*Wishing you well,  
Norm"*

# The Moro River

## December 5-9, 1943

**H.C. Chadderton:** Our Canadians troops were now heading into what was called the bloodiest month of the whole Italian Campaign. The objective, Ortona, right on the Adriatic, it was only four miles north of the valley of the Moro River, but what a four miles.

Charles Comfort, the famous Canadian artist who was over there to paint the war pictures, gave this description of the imposing terrain. And we'll quote him.

*"The valley below was typical of the water courses that channel this coastal plain... at the bottom, a muddy stream, high at this season.*

*The Canadians, approaching from the south will have to go down a steep incline, find some way to get across the river and then climb up the reverse slope, all under German gunfire of every description."*

**Doc Buckley:** "Dear Dad,

*The rivers in Italy, on this coast, are all in flood stage at this time of year. At a "sitrep" today (that's army lingo for a report on the situation) we heard of another enterprising move, this time by the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps. The general staff were talking about their brilliant move across the Sangro River. They were given some amphibious vehicles, called "DUKWS (Ducks)" to ferry supplies and ammunition around the mouth of the river, and that saved the day.*

*Now I can tell you some of the story of the crossing of the Moro River. You will see by the sketch that the main objectives were San Leonardo and Villa Rogatti. This job was given to the Hastings and Prince Edwards, the Seaforth Highlanders and the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.*

*The Hasty P's attacked across the Moro River and established a bridgehead. They were backed by the field guns of the Second Field Regiment and mortars of the Saskatoon Light Infantry. The Patricia's captured Villa Rogatti..."*

**Matthew Halton:** *This is Matthew Halton of the CBC speaking from Italy. It is late at night on the Moro River, one of the bloodiest battles we've had. Soaking wet, in a morass of mud, against an enemy fighting harder than he's fought before, the Canadians attack and attack and attack. The enemy is now fighting like the very devil to hold us, but he can't do it. He brings in more and more guns, more and more troops in the hillsides and orchards around San Leonardo. To cross the gorge of the river now and go up the spiralling road into San Leonardo by day*

*or night is a fierce thing. You run not only through shellfire, especially along one exposed 400 yard stretch, but also through machine gun fire. When you get there, the enemy's multiple fire mortars are pounding the village. They fire six shells at a time and they come with six loud, evil moans in quick succession.*

**Doc Buckley:**

*"...By December 6<sup>th</sup>, we had our infantry across the Moro River in two places. However, they were only what we call bridgeheads. Now the trick was to build bridges to carry the whole division. That plan was dropped because the engineers could only build one bridge and that had to be closer to the direct route to Ortona.*

*What it meant was, instead of the Canadians outflanking San Leonardo from the left and then advancing over the much flatter countryside, we were faced with a series of costly frontal attacks across ridges, gullies, and streams.*

*The capture of San Leonardo is being credited to the Calgary Tank Regiment and we are hearing the name of Major Ned Amy who had come to the Calgary's from the Ontario Regiment. I understand he is up for the DSO. The Infantry Battalions in on the San Leonardo victory were the RCRs, the Seaforths and the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders.*

*You'll remember that there are three brigades in a division. Up until now, the Canadians had been fighting in attacks by individual brigades. The battle for the Moro was different. It was the first time all three brigades fought together in one attack. At the end of the battle of the Moro River, the First Division war diarist wrote on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December: "This day would be remembered by the First Canadians for a long, long time. We had our first real battle on a divisional level with the Germans..."*

# The Gully

## December 11 - 18, 1943

**Doc Buckley:**

*“Dear Dad,*

*Now, about a place called “The Gully.” After the Canadians penetrated the Moro River, the Germans retreated only a few miles and set up a very strong position along the Ortona Road. In front of it was a natural barrier – a narrow, deep gully, running all the way from the coast inland about two and one-half miles. The Canadians would have to find some way to get at the Germans on the other side. We found that not only were the Germans defending the far side but they had set up defensive positions on our side of the gully, known as Vino Ridge.*

*According to the reports I heard, some vicious arguments broke out at a meeting held by General Chris Vokes. Some of the CO’s were opting for a flanking movement but General Vokes, reading his intelligence reports, said there was no way but straight ahead. The battalion commanders left the briefing shaking their heads, knowing they were in for some costly fighting.*

*They were right. The battle for the Gully raged for more than a week. It was an acid test of the courage and battle savvy of our infantry, tanks, anti-tanks, artillery and machine gunners...”*

**H.C. Chadderton:**

In 1985, while I was part of a delegation that revisited the Italian battle grounds, I stood on a very high building in San Leonardo with General Pat Bogert. Now, I want to tell you, there was one fine gentleman. He had commanded the West Nova Scotia Regiment. He ended up the war as a General and he is the only General who fought not only in Italy and Sicily, but also in Northwest Europe and also in Korea. Pat told me the story of the gully into my tape recorder.

**Pat Bogert:**

It was December 11<sup>th</sup>, a Saturday I think, old boy. That was the day the Battle for the Gully really started. On the right, the Patricia’s got across Vino Ridge, brave buggers those, and then dug in. They were close enough to the Germans to throw grenades at them but there was little of that.

Then over on the left, there was Hoff, the Brigade Commander, you know, that’s Bert Hoffmeister, he sent in the Seaforths, backed by the tanks of the Ontario Regiment. The best we could claim was a standoff. We made no real progress but we did retain the high ground. Tough bloody show, you know.

Graeme “Grimy” Gibson was commanding our Brigade, the 3<sup>rd</sup>. We had been through three strenuous weeks around the flooded Sangro.

Anyway, the Brigadier called me and ordered the West Novas to pass through the Seaforths. Frankly, I thought he was a silly twit. Anyway, he said attack across the Gully, to Casa Berardi. There was a bright moon. To our bloody surprise, we were standing a few yards from a German position. Christ, what we put up with. Just as we started to dig in, Jerry launched a number of counterattacks. To make matters worse, it started to rain - that damn Italian rain. But I had more to worry about. I had taken a bullet in the leg.

**H.C. Chadderton:** Three hard, bloody days of fighting and the Canadians had still been unable to breach the Gully. A further attack went in on the third day; it was led by the Carleton Yorks supported by the Calgary Tanks and maximum artillery. This was on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, early in the morning. Pat Bogert again explained what happened.

**Pat Bogert:** The Carletons found they were up against a newly arrived German Parachute Regiment. The bastards stopped them cold. One company did get across the Gully, only to find themselves cut off. They put up a stiff fight but were eventually taken prisoner.

**H.C. Chadderton:** Fortunately, I still had the tape recorder running. An officer from the Ontario Tanks came along and he volunteered to describe the Casa Berardi battle. He started with the action of Major Snuffy Smith. Snuffy who later became a War Amp, was, of course, a very good friend of mine. Here is what we could decipher from that tape, from the officer of the Ontario Tanks.

**Ontario Tank Major:** You see over there, the high ground to the left. Well the road you can see was there then and it lead straight into Ortona. Snuffy was a helluva soldier. He led his tanks down that road which would allow us to outflank the Gully. The Ontario Tanks knocked out two or three German tanks and cleared the way for the Seaforths. After some mopping up, Snuffy was able to get his tanks going again and they made it almost all the way to Casa Berardi.

**H.C. Chadderton:** At this point in the conversation, an Officer from the Royal 22<sup>nd</sup> took over.

**Royal 22<sup>nd</sup> Officer:** Well, firstly Cliff, we got some bad information. We were told that Casa Berardi was being held by the 90<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Division which had been badly beaten up. Well, we did not know that this Division had been relieved on the night of the December 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> by the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Division, which they told us later, was the best German troops in Italy. Our orders were to attack at 0700 hours on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, with support from the Ontario Regiment. We, that is the Royale 22<sup>iem</sup>, would follow a creeping barrage with artillery. This was where Captain Paul Triquet won his VC.

As soon as the bombardment ended, and he could not wait for the tanks, Triquet led his company toward the damn Cider crossroads. Next, Major Smith's surviving Shermans, I think about seven, roared up out of the Gully.

Well, nothing stopped Triquet. He had about 50 men left. His words, they still ring out in the history of the Van Doos. Although his men were dropping all around, he shouted, "Ils peuvent pas tirer. N'inquietez-vous pas. On y va." Which means "They can't shoot. Never mind them. Come on."

The fighting had been going on, you know, for about seven hours. Triquet started with 81 men, he had 14 left. He called for smoke from the Ontario Tanks and, with Triquet leading, the Van Doos charged. They made it to the stone walls of Casa Berardi, which you can still see standing today. They are marked with bullets and shells. By 1530 hours, Paul Triquet had captured Casa Berardi. He was told to hold the place until reinforcements could arrive. I was wounded at the bottom of the Gully.

Well, you know, Triquet was the first Canadian to be awarded the Victoria Cross in the Italian Campaign. Snuffy Smith, of the Ontario Tanks, he won the Military Cross.

**Pat Bogert:**

Hard to believe Cliff, we had Casa Berardi but, God man, we still did not have the Cider Crossroads. As we just heard, the Van Doos and the Ontario Tanks at Casa Berardi were isolated on the far side of The Gully. You're an old infantry man, so you know what came next. We had to exploit our bloody position.

Before I get to the battle, did you ever hear about the row between General Chris Vokes and Montgomery? Monty was disappointed with the progress and even suggested the Canadians were not pulling their weight. Well, you know Chris Vokes. He told Monty's Liaison Officer that Monty should come up himself and he would see the problem. And, by God, the old man did. I think it was December the 15<sup>th</sup> when Monty arrived. And sure as God made little green apples, Monty realized for the first time what a tough nut we had to crack, I mean this Gully and the damned Cider Crossroads.

As I remember old boy, the three-phase plan called for the 48<sup>th</sup> to push across the Gully to the west of Casa Berardi. Next, the good ol' RCRs would advance to the Crossroads. And let me see, the final phase? Oh yes, the Second Brigade, they would pass through and capture Ortona.

Give them their due. On December 18<sup>th</sup>, the 48<sup>th</sup> got moving and successfully outflanked Jerry. I hope the historians realize that this was a brilliant manoeuvre. The CO of the 48<sup>th</sup>, Ian Johnston, got the

DSO. Brigadier Bruce Matthews might well have earned his decoration there too. He laid on the artillery.

God, you might have known things were going too good. The second half of the plan was a near disaster. The Christly maps were wrong. So guess what? Our own shells were falling among the Carleton Yorks, on the near side of the Gully, and the poor 48<sup>th</sup> on the far side.

**H.C. Chadderton:** I shake my head when I think of it, but this proved disastrous for the two RCR assault companies. Strome Galloway, who was a prominent Company Commander with the RCR, described what happened next.

**Strome Galloway:** Never before during either the Sicilian or the Italian Campaign had the regiment run into such a death trap. The dead, the dying and the wounded lay everywhere and the stretcher bearers who worked bravely and feverishly, found that the Red Cross armband was no protection against mortar fragments or machine-gun bullets.

**H.C. Chadderton:** Nevertheless, The Royal Canadian Regiment, reduced to a fighting strength of less than 200 officers and other ranks, did indeed capture the Cider Crossroads. This cleared the way for the Battle of Ortona.

## Ortona

### (December 20 - 28, 1943)

#### H.C. Chadderton:

No one expected a tough fight in Ortona. It was generally thought that, after the Gully, the Germans had retreated to at least three miles north of the Arielli River. Instead, two battalions of German paratroopers awaited the Canadians in this heavily fortified town.

One of the best descriptions of Ortona is found in the book, *The D-Day Dodgers*, by Daniel Dancocks. A few quotes will give the picture:

*"...Ortona was a picturesque community. Nearby was the great dome of the cathedral of San Tommaso, visible for miles around. The older part of town consisted of tall, narrow houses and dark cramped streets. Because of a deep ravine west of town, and the steep cliffs and sea on the other, there was only one way into Ortona; along Route 16, the road which had been protected by Casa Berardi.*

*Side streets had been sealed off with rubble in order to channel the attackers along the main boulevard into the town. The central square had been turned into a killing ground, the surrounding buildings filled with guns and mortars carefully sited to lay down a murderous cross-fire.*

*Very few of the residents were still in Ortona in December 1943. Able-bodied males were sent to work as slave labour in northern Italy, while a great many others fled to the mountains. In a way, this was a good thing, for these people were spared the sight of the almost total destruction of their town..."*

#### Doc Buckley:

*"December 25, 1943*

*Dear Dad,*

*Our boys are fighting hard, while back in Canada, their families are enjoying Christmas dinner. The objective is the coastal town of Ortona and it is a fierce battle.*

*Five days ago, December 20<sup>th</sup>, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and Shermans of the Three Rivers got into the outskirts of the town along the main road. We found out that, courageous as they might be, one battalion could not capture the town. They were reinforced by the Seaforth Highlanders of Vancouver.*

*We have in Italy, another new technique: house to house fighting. You see, the main road is covered by German defensive fire, so it is necessary to clear the town building-by-building. To do this, the Canadians have developed a technique called "mouse holing."*

*Soldiers progress from house to house by blasting small holes in the walls of each adjoining building, breaking through and then clearing each dwelling room by room. It is an agonizing progression, but this way, they can clear entire blocks without setting foot in the street.*

*Dad, this is a hard time of year to be away from home. For some of the boys, it's their fifth Christmas overseas.*

*Your loving son,  
Norm"*

**Matthew Halton:**

*This is Matthew Halton, of the CBC, speaking from Italy. At 8:00 this morning I was bumping over the tank ruts into the outskirts of Ortona. There was a strange silence and I surmised something. Only a few machine guns were clattering. Only an occasional enemy shell was falling and bearded men who hadn't had their boots off for 30 days were laughing. The colonel grinned when I came in. I said, don't tell me. And he replied yes, I think we've got Ortona. Not two minutes later, the radio buzzed and Corporal Bill Polville of Edmonton, took the message from the signaller at the Port, not 400 yards away. Then he took off his earphones and turned to the Colonel. Sir, the Jerries have gone, or else they're all dead. Ortona was ours.*

**H.C. Chadderton:**

The battle for Ortona was over. The German paratroops had pulled out during the night.

Artist Charles Comfort went into the town and was astonished. The buildings were tottering crazily and the great cathedral, San Tomasso, had been blown up by the Germans. Comfort was so upset he was unable to do any sketching but he did return later to paint the wreckage of this once great church.

An analysis of the Battle of Ortona, in the weeks afterwards, was inevitable. Doc Buckley, with the advantage of spending time in conferences at various Headquarters levels, well now, maybe he got it right. Let's go to his letter of January the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1944.

**Doc Buckley:**

*"...The General, Chris Vokes, is being criticized and the consensus among senior officers is that the headlong attacks in the area of The Gully and the final assault on Ortona itself need not have taken place. Some more logical minds point out, however, that Vokes did indeed attempt a flanking attack to the west of Ortona, but it failed.*

*I overheard one senior officer who knew the truth. He remembered General Montgomery telling Vokes to get on with it. Monty meant the same frontal attacks that were so costly in World War I. Vokes had no alternative.*

*The casualty lists from Ortona are terrifying. The men didn't know about the tactics but they would always remember the terror of The Gully..."*

## Part One – Conclusion

**H.C. Chadderton:** The battles from the Moro River, past Ortona, cost the 1<sup>st</sup> Div 695 dead and 1,738 wounded. Strome Galloway, recalling the condition of the Royal Canadian Regiment, said this:

**Strome Galloway:** Of the 41 officers who had landed at Pachino less than six months before, only nine remained with the battalion, and of these, six had already been wounded once. The battalion landed 756 strong; by now over 550 of the “originals” were numbered among the killed, wounded, missing and prisoners-of-war, or had fallen victims to the scourges of malaria, jaundice and other ailments.

**H.C. Chadderton:** Since hitting the beaches of Sicily, in what, July of '43, the Canadians had earned a reputation as a tough, rugged bunch of soldiers. But the Germans, they were no slouches either.

And many of them had had battle experience on the Russian front. Yet, despite the tremendous advances by the Allies, including the Canadians, Rome remained in German hands. Many more months of hard fighting lay ahead for the Canadians as they continued their advance into Northern Italy.

# PART II: THE D-DAY DODGERS

## Introduction

**H.C. Chadderton:** In Part One of our video, titled *A War of Their Own*, we dealt with the first six months of the fighting in Sicily and Italy. Let me pontificate for a minute or two.

The Canadians acquitted themselves with honour and distinction from the time they landed on the shores of Sicily - that was July of 43 – right through to the battles on the Italian mainland, where they captured Campobasso and the heavily defended town of Ortona. That was Christmas of '43.

So, who were these historic regiments? Well, there was The Royal Canadian Regiment, mostly from London, Ontario; Toronto's 48th Highlanders and the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment recruited mostly from around Belleville, Ontario. That was the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade came from Western Canada. It consisted of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and Vancouver's Seaforth Highlanders.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was made up of the famous Royal 22<sup>nd</sup>, or Van Doos, from Quebec; New Brunswick's Carleton and York Regiment and the West Nova Scotia Regiment.

These famous infantry regiments were supported by the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Tank Brigade. That included the Calgary Regiment, the Ontario Regiment and the Three Rivers Regiment of Quebec.

**H.C. Chadderton:** We return now, to Doc Buckley, he was a great friend of mine. Doc was a former paratroop medical officer and was injured. He then was posted to a military headquarters. His letters and his journal provide an insight into the experiences of the Canadians fighting firstly in Sicily and then in Italy.

**Doc Buckley:** *"New Year's Eve, 1943*

*Dear Dad,*

*After six months in action, the Canadians have won many battle honours, and have earned quite a reputation with the Germans. They call our boys the red patch devils because nothing seems to stop them. But, from what I see when I make my rounds at the casualty clearing stations, this war is taking its toll. The division is more than a*

*1,000 men below strength. Worse, every infantry battalion has suffered 50 per cent casualties in its rifle companies.*

*The good news is they've gained valuable experience in mountain warfare and river crossings that will prove crucial as they continue their advance.*

*Love Norm"*

# The First Special Service Force

**H.C. Chadderton:** And now we come to a story that is not very well known in Canada. While the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division was engaged in the ferocious Battle for Ortona, another group of their countrymen had just taken part in a crucial battle on the western side of Italy.

They were called the First Special Service Force. It was a large Canadian and American commando-type fighting unit. It had been formed in secret in 1942, as specialized shock troops. They were trained as parachutists and in mountain climbing and in the use of special weapons including those which might be captured from the enemy. Colonel Tom Gilday, who joined that Force reported, and I quote:

*“...I picked trappers and hunters, Bushmen, farmers’ sons, all good individual outdoor types. Types who would know their way around in the woods and in the country and in all kinds of weather conditions...”*

Let’s talk about Scotty Moir. He was one of the most popular members of the First Special Service Force. His daughter, Robin Moir, is a well-known Ottawa singer, composer and television producer. In all too brief words, she tells the story of the Special Service Force in Italy.

**Robin Moir:** They landed in Italy on November 19, 1943, as part of the US 5<sup>th</sup> Army. Their first battle, as my father related, was to capture Monte la Difensa, which was on the way to Monte Cassino and eventually to Rome.

It was a gruelling climb up a fortress-like mountain 3,000 feet high. They climbed for seven hours straight, under cover of darkness carrying their heavy packs, then continued the climb the next night. Their blackened faces and dirt-stained uniforms made them almost invisible. It was a feat of incredible endurance, but they did it. Hidden by fog, they scaled the top cliffs and took the enemy by surprise.

The Force’s first month in Italy had been costly. Out of a combat strength of 1,800 men, 1,400 were either dead or hospitalized for frostbite and trenchfoot. Nevertheless, it had established an impressive record. I am told that, thanks largely to the efforts of this elite Canadian/American unit, the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Army was finally ready to launch its offensive on Rome.

Their next objective was Anzio: a major amphibious operation, with the troops landing at this small Italian port in an attempt to cut off the Germans south of it.

Over a two-year period, from 1942-1944, the First Special Service Force captured more than 30,000 prisoners, won five US campaign stars and earned eight Canadian battle honours. They never failed a mission.

## Fifth Armoured Division

**H.C. Chadderton:** It had been decided at Canadian Army General Staff that the 1<sup>st</sup> Division in Italy would be reinforced with the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. This included one armoured brigade and two mobile infantry brigades. They landed at various ports in Italy from England in November of 1943.

Now this armoured brigade consisted of the Lord Strathcona's Horse, the 8<sup>th</sup> New Brunswick Hussars and the British Columbia Dragoons.

The motorized infantry brigades included the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade that was made up of the Cape Breton Highlanders, the Perths, from Ontario, and the Irish Regiment, mostly from Toronto. The 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade that was the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards, the Lanark and Renfrew Scottish Regiment and the Westminster Regiment.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Div also included the Governor General's Horse Guards and the Royal Canadian Dragoons, which was an armoured-car unit.

**Doc Buckley:**

*"Dear Dad,*

*Big news! The first battle has been fought by the infantry of the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, who were holding a line which stretched 3,000 yards inland from the Adriatic. I got the story from the first casualties when they came back to our hospitals.*

*On January 17<sup>th</sup>, the Perths and the Cape Bretoners, supported by the tanks of the Three Rivers Regiment, were ordered to cross the Riccio River and drive the Germans back to the Arielli River.*

*The Perths went first, followed by the Cape Breton Highlanders. They soon found out that the tough German paratroopers who had been causing the Canadians so much grief for months could throw up a defence along the north side of these ravines. It was a costly lesson. Forty-seven dead for the Perths. The Cape Bretoners lost 46..."*

## North of Ortona

**Doc Buckley:** *"March 18, 1944*

*Dear Dad,*

*It is now the winter of 1944. We are not making any headway to get up the Adriatic Coast. Since February, we've lost 120 killed and 585 wounded. Many of the wounded would have died except for a new miracle drug called penicillin. Can you believe it is in short supply because they tell us it is too expensive!*

*The intelligence reports from the units are ghastly. It seems there is nothing out there except mud, shattered farm houses, and burned vehicles, but it is really the weather. It's bitterly cold. Half the time, instead of snow we see rain.*

*Frostbite is a common medical problem. These battle hardened Canadian boys are suffering from exposure. Heavy battle dress soaks up the moisture and then freezes, the greatcoats do the same thing; and these men are living in the open. They have rubberized groundsheets – useless! I can only say God help them. But that isn't the worst.*

*The Generals have inflicted on these seasoned troops a stupid policy of constant patrolling, a risky business and often a waste of lives.*

*P.S. The forthcoming invasion across the English Channel is affecting us here in Italy. We have been restricted in the number of reinforcements we will get..."*

**Robin Moir:**

The landing at Anzio has gone down in history as a disaster, but the First Special Service Force covered itself with glory. They took over one-quarter of the 30-mile long front. February 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1944, marked the beginning of 98 days of continuous action and they were up against the Hermann Göring Division.

This was the battlefield in which Canada's most decorated Aboriginal soldier, Tommy Prince from Manitoba, earned both the American Silver Star and the Canadian Military Medal. There is a statue to his honour in a Winnipeg Park. He was a scout, but instead of taking his sniper's rifle, he once went out with a field telephone. He hid behind enemy lines. The next day he directed accurate artillery fire to knock out several German tanks.

The attack at Anzio was supposed to outflank the Germans, but it merely became a beachhead holding on to a valuable piece of property while the rest of the American 5<sup>th</sup> Army caught up and headed for Monte Cassino and Rome.



## The Gustav & Hitler Lines

**H.C. Chadderton:**

Now we go to the Battle in the Liri Valley that commenced May the 11<sup>th</sup> of 1944. The 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Brigade was part of the spearhead. The Gustav Line blocked the entrance to the valley and Hitler had ordered that it be defended at all costs.

The Shermans of the Calgary Tanks, the Ontario Regiment and the Three Rivers Regiment, made a difficult crossing over the Gari River. After four days of hard fighting, the Gustav Line had been breached. The Germans then withdrew to the Adolph Hitler Line.

Back to the Infantry regiments of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division... They were then thrown into the Liri Valley advance and once again, the RCRs, the Hasty P's, they were in the forefront. Later the Royal 22<sup>nd</sup>, supported by the Three Rivers Regiment, thickened up the attack. Again we hear the deeds of the Carleton Yorks and the West Novas. The Toronto 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders, they are also doing very well.

By May the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Canadians were at the edge of the Hitler Line. This was supposed to stop the Allies from going north to Rome. The plan to assault the Hitler Line, which was drawn up by the Canadians with great trepidation, it was code-named Operation Chesterfield.

The Polish Corps, let's talk about them. They had fought alongside of the Canadians as part of the British Army. They had captured Monte Cassino on May the 18<sup>th</sup>, and that in itself is a tremendous story. Now, the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards, they were acting as a Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment, they had carried out a successful penetration which indicated, quite falsely, that the south end of the Hitler Line was lightly held.

Daniel Dancocks in the book, *The D-Day Dodgers*, said this:

*"...Operation Chesterfield was scheduled for 0600 hours on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. The artillery would lay down the creeping barrage, paving the way for the three leading assault battalions, the PPCLI, the Seaforths, and the Carleton and York Regiment. The Loyal Edmonton Regiment was arrayed behind the Patricias while the West Nova Scotia Regiment backed up the Carletons.*

*The western Canadians of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade walked into disaster. As soon as they cleared the woods, they were engulfed in a storm of enemy fire. Their tank support had blundered into a minefield and were unable to move forward. The infantry pushed on alone, trying to keep up to the barrage. At every step men fell; some were victims of Nebelwerfer fire, many were dropped by machine gun bullets, and others trod on mines scattered about the barbed wire entanglements.*

*Only one Patricia made it to the objective. The popular major, Bucko Watson, worked his way through the barbed wire accompanied by a few of his men. Within minutes, all the others had been killed or wounded. Watson was wounded twice then took refuge in a large shell hole and waited for help to arrive...”*

**H.C. Chadderton:** In poured the Seaforths, the Loyal Eddies and the Patricia's, only to be pinned down in the midst of this Hitler Line. But if May the 23<sup>rd</sup> was a black day for these Western Canadian battalions, it was a great success for the Maritimers. Pat Bogert, who had commanded the West Nova Scotia Regiment, told me the story.

**Pat Bogert:** The Carleton and Yorks, those lovely boys from the Maritimes, were the only regiment that had a chance to recce the fortifications. I tell you, they were bloody good soldiers. They knew what to expect. It took just 75 minutes for this New Brunswick Regiment to breach the defences. Behind them came the men of my regiment, the West Novies. And despite seeing our British tank support practically demolished, we charged ahead, with the Van Doos and The Three Rivers Tanks in support. It was a bloody good show.

**H.C. Chadderton:** Once inside the Hitler Line, the Hasty P's did their job. An example was Sergeant Jack Loshaw. He was later awarded the coveted Military Medal. He had overrun the enemy and taken 19 prisoners.

By 1900 hours on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, the last obstacle before Pontecorvo was taken, this time by the Hasty P's. With the capture of Pontecorvo, the road to Rome was open.

**Doc Buckley:** **(Journal entry)**

*“...The death toll from the day-long battle at the Hitler Line was heartbreaking. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division reported 879 casualties. Padre Roy Durnford oversaw the burial of 52 Seaforths in the regimental cemetery. ‘Bodies keep coming in,’ the weary padre wrote in his diary, ‘mute testimony to awful victory. The cemetery is filling up fast. Work goes on at a fast and furious pace...I go to bed, but not to sleep.’...”*

**H.C. Chadderton:** The bitter fighting in which the Canadian soldiers broke through the strongest of all the enemy's positions, the Adolph Hitler Line, was to link the name of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps with the great defensive position that Adolph Hitler had said would protect Rome and the rest of Northern Italy.

# The Nursing Sisters

**H.C. Chadderton:** As a combat veteran of the Canadian Army who was wounded, I came under the care of our Canadian nursing sisters, and believe me, it is a real privilege to tell their story, to tell what they did in the Italian theatre for example. In fact, the nursing sisters deserve a whole video of their own, if we only had the time.

No. 5 General Hospital came from Taplow in England. They landed at a place called Augusta, on the East Coast of Sicily. The date: July the 19<sup>th</sup>. They were the first women to be landed in a Canadian combat zone. The front line, only a few miles to the north, and just as this unit was getting settled in, the two ships carrying their hospital equipment were sunk in Augusta harbour.

No. 14 General Hospital had been lost almost in its entirety en route to Sicily. They were aboard the SS Santa Elena. It was sunk by German dive bombers. By some good fortune, there were no casualties.

Generally, the Canadian nursing service made a tremendous contribution in both the Sicily and Italian parts of this campaign. They sent over enough nurses to staff five field hospitals. Now, a field hospital is a bit behind the lines, but the nurses were also very close to the fighting. Because, they provided immediate nursing service in what was called the casualty clearing stations. This meant the wounded could get immediate attention.

**Nursing Sister Voice:** As usual, it was a gruelling day at the casualty clearing station. We can hear the steady pounding of artillery. I have been on my feet now for 36 hours. I'm exhausted, but my mind is racing. I keep thinking of that young man from Saskatchewan; such terrible wounds. Shrapnel is an evil menace. Keeping his wounds infection free has been an enduring struggle. Patients are dying while we wait for shipments of sulfa and penicillin. There is a steady flow of wounded being evacuated to our station. At times it is impossible to keep up. In all the beds and seemingly every inch of the ground lay our boys. We do our best and, if anybody writes our history, let them say – we tried to care for them all.

**H.C. Chadderton:** One of the well known soldiers of the Cape Breton Highlanders was wounded at the battle of Coriano Ridge. He was the late Dan MacDonald of P.E.I. He lost an arm and a leg. He later became minister of Veterans Affairs. On a pilgrimage to Italy after the war, Dan MacDonald gave an emotional speech at the former site of No. 5 Casualty Clearing Station in Ravenna. If I can remember, he told about regaining consciousness with a nurse bandaging what remained of his left arm. Then, he looked down and another nurse

was removing a tourniquet from the stump of his right leg. They asked him if he wanted some more painkillers. His reply was typical of both Dan MacDonald and also the effect upon wounded soldiers of nursing sisters. That reply? "I think I'll put up with the pain for awhile. I just want to enjoy the company of two young Canadian ladies from home."

G.W.L. Nicholson, in his excellent book, *Canada=s Nursing Sisters*, had this to say:

*"...No longer could there be any official reservations about the wisdom of employing nurses so far forward in the time of battle. A positive answer had been given in the valuable contribution made by the nurses serving with surgical units and surgical teams throughout the Italian campaign..."*

# Melfa River

## May 24, 1944

**Doc Buckley:**

**(Journal entry)**

*"May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1944*

*I visited corps headquarters today and was put in the picture as to what has been and is happening.*

*The 1<sup>st</sup> Division, which has been in action since July of '43 in Sicily, was credited with breaking through the Hitler Line. Now it would be the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, called the Mighty Maroon Machine, based on the colour of their shoulder patches.*

*The 5<sup>th</sup> Div, supported by the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade, was ordered to establish a bridgehead on the Melfa River: the next German fortified position blocking the way to Rome. The attack was under command of Major General Bert Hoffmeister, another civilian soldier who is holding his own, or even showing up, some of the permanent force officers. Two strike forces were organized to lead the river crossing.*

*Fred Vokes commands the British Columbia Dragoons. He is the younger brother of Chris Vokes. He would have not only his own Regiment, but the Irish Regiment with him. Vokes Force would lead, then Griffin Force, led by Lieutenant- Colonel Paddy Griffin, commanding the Lord Strathcona's Horse and the Westminster Regiment, would pass through. Covering the flanks was the Governor General's Horse Guards (sometimes called God's Gift to Hungry Girls), referring to their initials.*

*The action started on May 24<sup>th</sup>. The BC Dragoons encountered the new Mark V Panther tanks, 50-ton monsters belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> Panzer Regiment. They were the first to knock out a Panther tank in Italy. The Canadian gunner died moments later when his tank was brewed up by a German self-propelled gun.*

*However, Vokes Force was successful in routing the Germans and Griffin Force passed through, led by the Strathcona's recce troop equipped with the American Honey light tanks. Their job was to get to the Melfa and hold a crossing. The troop was under command of Lieutenant Ed Perkins. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon, he had three of his tanks across the Melfa."*

**H.C. Chadderton:** Here's a story you might enjoy, if that's the right word, in talking about war. It involves the Westminster Regiment. They made a dash to reach the Melfa River crossing which was held tenuously by Lieutenant Perkins. They were under the command of Major John Mahony. The Major organized an attack across the river into enemy territory.

Shortly before dusk, the Germans launched a counterattack. As the German tanks came in, Mahony gave the order; every available weapon was to open fire. The German infantry accompanying the attack went to ground. What happened next can only be described as a mess.

The German tanks were milling around and Mahony's small force attacked them by throwing grenades into open turrets and firing hand held anti-tank missiles. Mahony was the inspiration for his men. The Canadians knew they were badly outnumbered but Mahony kept moving around joking, laughing, urging his men to hold on, and they did. Mahony won the Victoria Cross, the second to be awarded to a Canadian in Italy.

You know, if the Westminsters had not held the Melfa Bridgehead, the Germans could have reorganized. The intelligence reports indicate, however, that the bold actions of the Canadians at the Melfa Crossing completely disrupted the German plans. Let's go back to the Buckley diaries.

**Doc Buckley:** *"Dear Dad,*

*This sketch will give you some idea of the whole Liri Valley offensive. You can note at the right, the Gustav Line anchored on Monte Cassino. The Canadians moved west and some of the objectives were Pignataro and, at the Adolf Hitler Line, Pontecorvo and Aquino. Once breeched, the boys moved on to the Melfa and were heading for Ceperano and the road to Rome.*

*Rome was close, but to the bitter disappointment of the Canadians, the honour of taking Rome on June 4<sup>th</sup> would go to the American 5<sup>th</sup> Army. There was some consolation. The Yank's were led by an American-Canadian Force..."*

**H.C. Chadderton:** On June 6<sup>th</sup>, less than 48 hours after the fall of Rome, the long-awaited D-Day invasion of Northwest Europe began on the Normandy beaches. And as a result, by and large, the rest of the Italian campaign, more or less, fell into the backwater of the public consciousness.

**Doc Buckley:**

"29th August, 1944

*Dear Dad,*

*Our official army magazine here in Italy, The Maple Leaf, indicates that at this particular time, big things are happening elsewhere. The Soviets are at the gates of Warsaw. In France the Americans, Brits and Canadians are breaking out of the Normandy beachhead; and then some of the troops who were fighting on the other coast of Italy, including our own Special Service Force, invaded Southern France.*

*Italy is now being called the secondary front. Well, none of this has affected the morale of the Canadian Army. For us, the battle rages on.*

*Your loving son,  
Norm"*

# The D-Day Dodgers

**H.C. Chadderton:** The D-Day Dodgers, that's the name by which the Allied troops in Italy became known.

Supposedly, the originator was Lady Astor, a member of the British Parliament. The nickname implied that the troops in Italy were avoiding the "real" war in France. Now, naturally, some of the boys in Italy considered the name a bit of a slur, so they put out an extremely clever response. It tells much of the story of what the Canadians and the Allies did in the Sicilian and Italian campaigns.

## **D-Day Dodgers song follows:**

We are the D-Day Dodgers, way out in Italy,  
Always on the vino, and always on the spree.  
Eighth Army scroungers and their tanks,  
We live and rove among the Yanks,  
We are the D-Day Dodgers, in sunny Italy.

We fought into Agira, a holiday with pay;  
Jerry brought his bands out, to cheer us on our way,  
Showed us the sights and gave us tea,  
We all sang songs, the beer was free,  
We are the D-Day Dodgers, in sunny Italy.

The Moro and Ortona were taken in our stride,  
We didn't really fight there, we went there for the ride.  
Sleeping till noon and playing games,  
We live in Rome with lots of dames.  
We are the D-Day Dodgers, in sunny Italy.

On our way to Florence, we had a lovely time,  
We drove a bus from Rimini, right through the Gothic Line.  
Then to Bologna we did go,  
We all went swimming in the Po,  
We are the D-Day Dodgers, in sunny Italy.

Look around the mountains in the mud and rain,  
See the scattered crosses, there's some that have no name.  
Heartbreak and toil, and suffering gone,  
The boys beneath and slumber on.  
They are the D-Day Dodgers, who stay in Italy.  
They are the D-Day Dodgers, who stay in Italy.

# The Gothic Line

## August 30 - September 1, 1944

### Doc Buckley:

*“...It seems the Generals have been playing some giant game of musical chairs with the Canadians.*

*Top dog is Britain’s Sir Oliver Leese who, according to his track record, is no genius. Under him we have General Harold Alexander and the top Canadian, in charge of our corps now, is Tommy Burns, who took over from Harry Crerar. His nickname is “Smiler,” and while he might be brilliant, and this seems to be in doubt, he isn’t going to win any popularity polls with our guys...”*

### H.C. Chadderton:

So, let’s set the stage now for the major Canadian attack on the Gothic Line. It stretched from Pisa to Rimini. The Germans, who intended to prevent the Canadians and the British from breaking through to the Po Valley, had turned the Foglia River into a killing ground. Here are a few quotes from the book, *The Canadians in Italy*, by Gerry Nicholson:

*“...The low lying meadows on either side of the banks of the Foglia were treacherous. Every house and tree had been demolished to clear a field of fire. Minefields in the river flats were backed by the anti-tank ditch, some 14 feet across that zigzagged through most of the Canadian sector. Numerous machine-gun posts, encased in concrete, were connected by covered passages to deep dug-outs.*

*Wire obstacles, more formidable than any that the Canadians had yet encountered in Italy, surrounded these positions. Anti-tank guns awaited our armour; dug-in flamethrowers awaited our infantry. Panther tank turrets commanded the skyline for our attacking tanks...”*

### Dancocks:

The Canadians attacked on Wednesday afternoon, the 30<sup>th</sup> of August. It marked the start of a terrific, three-day battle to smash the Gothic Line. The first to test the defences were the hardy Maritimers of the West Nova Scotia Regiment. Ahead stood a vast minefield and the West Novas strode right into it.

Ninety minutes later, two battalions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division’s 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade tried their luck. The Cape Breton Highlanders and the Perth Regiment attacked the high ground behind Montecchio. After three attempts, the Perths took their objective at bayonet-point. The 5<sup>th</sup> Division had pried open the door of the Gothic Line; the next step was to smash it open.

While the Red Patches struggled, the key battles were being fought and won by Bert Hoffmeister’s Mighty Maroon Machine. The

Canadians were in Montecchio before the defenders realized what was happening.

The *coup de main* was staged by the B.C. Dragoons. The CO, Lieutenant-Colonel Fred Vokes, was ordered to take the Perths under his command and push towards Point 204. The Dragoons had trouble getting across the Foglia and, when Vokes failed to find the Perths' headquarters, he impetuously ordered the tanks to go ahead without the Infantry.

Fifty Shermans roared ahead. The survivors, for good reason, would call the regiment's route "Death Valley," because it had been designed as a killing ground for tanks. Only 18 tanks survived and the unit's 51 casualties included Colonel Fred Vokes, who was fatally wounded by a mortar blast after leaving his disabled Sherman. By 1430 hours, however, they had taken Point 204 and sounded the death knell of the Gothic Line.

The victory was sealed by the Perths, who arrived soon afterwards, escorted by the Shermans of the Lord Strathcona's Horse, known as the Straths.

#### **H.C. Chadderton:**

The remainder of the battle to reach the Gothic Line showed the Canadians at their best with tank and infantry cooperation. The Patricia's, backed by a squadron from a British tank regiment, pushed through on the left. The Seaforths, also supported by British tanks, pushed through the PPCLI. By darkness on August the 31<sup>st</sup>, the Canadians had ripped open a hole over a mile wide and two miles deep, a hole into the vaunted Gothic Line.

The Van Doos moved into action the next day. Their regimental history tells of a difficult, but successful fight. It involved several charges by the French-Canadians, but they were stopped by heavy fire from German concrete bunkers linked by tunnels. Lieutenant-Colonel Jean Allard surprised the Germans with another bit of Canadian initiative. He, of course, was the Regimental C.O. He sent up four armoured carriers on which they had mounted machine guns. This pinned down the defenders and allowed the Van Doos to rush up and dispatch the Germans with hand grenades.

The capture of the Gothic Line, a major victory in the battle for northern Italy and one in which Canadians were heavily involved. The community of Tavullia, which was part of that Gothic Line, unveiled a monument on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1997. It is a tremendous bit of architecture. It stands on the high ground, and it gives one an opportunity to see the panoramic view of the whole battle area. The words inscribed on the monument, which tell of the Canadians' participation, they read as follows:

*“Here the heroic deeds of the First Canadian Corps breached the imposing German defences with the loss of over one thousand young Canadians. Their battle was for the freedom of Italy and peace in Europe. The monument stands as a witness to, and as a warning for, future generations.”*

And when I was in Italy in 1999, there were Italian tourists and there were sightseers from many other countries who had come a long, long way just to see that very monument. It gave them an idea of what the Canadians had done. Moreover, it is probably the only monument constructed by the Italians which tells specifically of the contribution of our brave Canadian troops.

## Coriano Ridge September 13, 1944

**Doc Buckley:** “September, 1944

*Dear Dad,*

*Although the casualty list has been long and dreadful, morale in the Canadian army right now has never been higher. This is probably because, despite having only two under-strength divisions, the Canadians have broken through the Gothic Line. Still, the Canadian Divisions have their work cut out for them. Even though our 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions are making rapid headway towards Holland and Germany, the Germans are putting up a desperate rear guard battle in our part of Italy.*

*The Royal Canadian Regiment established a bridgehead towards the resort town of Riccione. They were supported by the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment. One would think that these battalions would be worn out, having been in action constantly since the Sicily landing in July of '43.*

*We hear now that the Germans have constructed another series of defensive positions called the Rimini Line. Coriano Ridge seems to be the big stumbling block...”*

**H.C. Chadderton:** Canada's 5<sup>th</sup> Div stormed Coriano Ridge on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September. They were backed by every piece of artillery the 8<sup>th</sup> Army could muster. The Cape Breton Highlanders and the Perth Regiment lead the assault and secured the ridge. The Irish Regiment of Canada passed through them to take the village of Coriano in a street battle as vicious and deadly as Ortona. In fact, fixed bayonets was the order of the day.

## Rimini

**Doc Buckley:**

*“Dear Dad,*

*At first, we welcomed the September rains because it settled the dust and cooled things off, but it has persisted and the mud is several inches deep. Vehicles slide off the roads and every river crossing becomes a major assault.*

*For men in the front lines, this means long hours in water-logged trenches resulting in something you would remember from World War One – trench foot. Our engineers work miracles around the clock to keep the roads clear and to build bridges which are continually washed away.*

*Our advance to Rimini is slow...”*

**Peter Stursberg:**

*The Canadians who are spearheading the 8<sup>th</sup> Army’s drive on Rimini are fighting their old opponents, the 1<sup>st</sup> German Paratroopers. The morale of these crack enemy troops is really remarkable, especially when you take into account the fact that they’ve been beaten up by the Canadians so often. While I was at a command post, I saw some prisoners brought in. They were paratroopers and I asked the interrogating officer what these men thought about the war, whether they thought it would last or not. He said no, they think they’re going to win the war. They believe that Hitler has always been right and that he’ll find a way. The interrogating officer shrugged his shoulder and said what can you do with such people? The Nazi paratroopers have been fighting like the fanatic believers that they are.*

**H.C. Chadderton:**

While the rest of the division punched through the San Fortunato defences, the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders and the RCR captured Rimini itself.

The Americans, and even some of the British General staff, despite Churchill’s views, were having second thoughts about continuing the Italian campaign. In northwest Europe, the British and the Canadians were liberating Brussels and Antwerp. The Americans were approaching the German frontier. Churchill was determined however, that the Allies should deliver a decisive victory in Italy. As he saw it, we had to keep up the pressure on the Germans, now fighting on three fronts: against the Russians in the east and the Allies in northwest Europe and, of course, in Italy. Churchill saw Italy as the gateway to the Balkans.

The breaking of the Rimini Line seemed to be the end so far as the Germans were concerned. Nonetheless, Hitler agreed to meet field-marshal Albert Kesselring’s demands for reinforcements. The Germans would continue to fight in Italy.

## The Savio River

### October 20 - 25, 1944

**Dancocks:** The Savio River was the biggest obstacle the Canadians had so far encountered in northern Italy. It lay in a muddy trough about 15 feet below ground level. The river was swollen with storm water from the mountains and in many places it was too deep to ford. The western bank afforded the enemy an excellent field of fire.

**H.C. Chadderton:** Talking about the Savio, the Patricia's did get a small force across and sent for reinforcements. Up came the Seaforths of Vancouver in single file. The Seaforths passed through the Loyal Edmontons, meeting German opposition immediately.

And now we come to a story that's very close to my heart. I have had the privilege of knowing Ernest "Smokey" Smith for many years. And you know, I get a little bit tired of reading history books and what this General did and what that General did, but the fighting was really done by the Smokey Smiths, by the guys who carried rifles and grenades and that's why I'm so pleased that, in this film, we can tell how Smokey Smith earned his Victoria Cross.

Smokey Smith, one of our most beloved Victoria Cross veterans, he had been in the battle right from the start, right from the landing at Pachino. He realized at the Savio, that the Germans had to be stopped. Along came a monstrous German Panther tank, its machine guns raking the roadside ditches. Smokey jumped onto the road in clear view. He waited. At a range of 30 feet, he fired his PIAT, knocking out the Panther. Ten Germans riding on the back of the tank leaped off and charged Smith. Smokey stood his ground. Then another tank came into view. When more German infantry attacked, he reloaded his tommy gun with magazines he had collected from a ditch. Time and again, the enemy swarmed around Smokey, only to be driven back.

One Canadian had knocked out two German Panther tanks and had scared the dickens out of maybe four or five others with their accompanying infantry. Smokey Smith won the third Victoria Cross for a Canadian in Italy.

**Doc Buckley:** *"November 1944  
By October 25<sup>th</sup>, the Canadians were across the Savio. What a month of disappointments. Instead of a quick advance, we have had to battle both enemy rearguards and the worst October weather in Italy in living memory. It looks like we are going to be here for another winter. How many more rivers to cross? ..."*

## Conscription Crisis

**H.C. Chadderton:**

Did you think we would do a video about the Canadian Army in World War Two without mentioning what, the famous conscription crisis? No way. This crisis hit the Forces in Italy harder than it did our formations in northwest Europe. I was with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in Belgium at this time. We were under strength, but the regiments in Italy were in even worse shape.

At the time of the 1944 crisis, there were 380,000 soldiers available in Britain and Canada, that's Canadian soldiers, who could go to the front. Of these, the Canadian Forces in Italy numbered only 85,000. Their battle order, that is, the number they should have had, was 150,000.

In Italy, by the beginning of May of '44, remustering became the sole manner of reinforcing Canadian combat units. Remustering? This meant that the wounded, along with cooks, drivers, clerks, batmen, they were all sent to the forward infantry.

Eventually the government did pass legislation which allowed the conscripts to be sent overseas. However, not one single conscript ever reached Italy.

**Doc Buckley:**

*"Dear Dad,*

*Christmas of 1944 has come as a bit of a stalemate. The old hands still remember last Christmas in Ortona, one of the toughest fights in which the Canadian Army has ever been involved.*

*This Christmas is marked by despair. Many of the troops have been wounded once or twice and have returned to their units. Youngsters in their early teens who had volunteered to see front line service but had not bargained for the hard conditions of an Italian winter.*

*Others are a little older; guys who had volunteered because they felt they could help the army with jobs such as truck drivers, medical orderlies and clerks. They don't complain about having to carry the war to the Germans but they're not filling roles for which they've been trained.*

*December has been a bloody month of river crossings, which have resulted in extremely high casualties, including a costly fight for the Lamone River. When the bridgehead was finally ours, the bodies of our dead lay beside heaps of empty cartridge cases, showing they had fought to the bitter end.*

*This war has been long and hard.*

*Your loving son,  
Norm”*

## **The Senio River**

### **January - February, 1945**

**H.C. Chadderton:** The new Corps Commander General Charles Foulkes, who replaced Tommy Burns, decided that, before winter set in, the Canadians would have the Senio River in our grasp. Easy for him to say.

The Germans, they were still putting up a stout defence in Italy. In fact, the 16<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Division, against whom the Canadians were fighting in Italy, was rated by the Germans, and others, as the strongest combat division available. The Germans were aggressive and the Canadians had to be constantly on the alert.

The biggest raid was staged by the Germans on February the 24<sup>th</sup>. The Germans, equipped with flame throwers, crossed the Senio after an all day bombardment by mortars and artillery. They were stopped cold in the Edmonton sector. The Seaforths were in support. Their Colonel, "Budge" Bell-Irving called for an artillery shoot right on top of his own position. As he stated and we quote, "Because we were in slit trenches and the enemy was running around in the open, we got away with it."

After the New Year, the Canadians cleared the Senio area and the fighting then largely ceased. Both sides hunkered down to wait out another appalling Northern Italy winter. The Senio was the farthest north the Canadians would go into Italy.

# Operation Goldflake

**Doc Buckley:** (Journal entry)  
*“January 1945*

*We’ve heard that for months Canada has been lobbying to reunite its army. There are some at Headquarters who see this as a rather “inglorious way” to finish off the tremendous successes of the Canadian army in Italy. Still, at the unit level, the boys welcome a chance to rejoin the Canadians in France and participate in the final crushing of the Germans in their own country...”*

**H.C. Chadderton:** Many of the Canadians thought that they were going to be stuck in Italy for the rest of the war. Then the orders for the move came and without warning. The operation was called “Goldflake.” With considerable pride we leave the venerable Strome Galloway, the RCR veteran, to sum up the feelings of the troops. He wrote:

**Strome Galloway:** Looking back, it is hard to believe that ordinary, peaceable men from the cities and the farms of Canada could face the terrors and brutalities of that particular battlefield day after day and night after night. The calibre of the men was quite magnificent. Most were between 20 and 25, quite a few were younger.

**H.C. Chadderton:** How sad it is, and yes, and emotional, to visit the cemeteries and see the ages of these young Canadians, 18, 19, 20. And to stop and read the inscriptions on these headstones sent in by a mother, for example, or a wife. I remember one, “I never thought our last goodbye would be forever.” These young Canadians, they went off to fight in a far off land and they never came home. They left to grieve mothers, fathers, wives, children, sweethearts. And to grieve for what? To grieve for their loss and to grieve for years and years and years, and to say to themselves, “What if it hadn’t happened? What would Charlie be doing today?” I’m telling you, the grieving at home is one of the worst parts of war.

Now, this war in Italy, to which the Canadians had made such a glowing contribution, it ended on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May of ‘45, just three days before the hostilities ceased with the Germans in northwest Europe.

The Italian Campaign was the longest sustained offensive undertaken by the Allies during the war, a bitter and bloody 22 months. From any standpoint, the strategy of the Germans made no sense. They lost far more than they gained.

**Doc Buckley:**

*"May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945*

*Dear Dad,*

*The war in Italy and Europe is finally over!*

*As the officer responsible, I am faced with the grim task of estimating the extent of our casualties in Sicily and Italy. I can give you these numbers. A total of 92,757 Canadians of all ranks served in this theatre and more than a quarter of them became casualties. The final toll is 5,764 dead, 19,486 wounded and 1,004 captured.*

*So many young lives lost in what some are calling the forgotten war. I for one will never forget the brave faces of those who were wounded or who died. We are all forever in their debt.*

*I'm coming home.*

*Love,  
Norm"*

**H.C. Chadderton:**

The Italian government and yes, even most of the Italian people, have virtually turned a blind eye to World War II. The Canadians were among 26 nationalities representing the Allied Forces in Italy. Only the cemeteries tell the tale of what happened here in those years of 1943 through 1944, and until the Armistice in '45.

The Canadian dead can be found in 17 war cemeteries between Sicily in the south and Northern Italy. Sadly the veterans of Italy seem to be Canada's forgotten heroes. For 11 months, they were front page news. After the invasion of Normandy on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1944, they toiled in virtual anonymity.

Still, there were some pluses. For example, some of the best officers and NCO's who landed on D-Day in Normandy had previously been sent to Italy for battle experience. And the landings at Sicily taught us an invaluable lesson when the time came to invade Normandy.

Although I, personally, was a combat veteran of the fighting in Normandy and Belgium and Holland, I hold the view, as we have tried to bring out in this video, that the Italian campaign was truly a war of their own.

Think of it, the jock columns, building new roads along ravines, the use of mules, mountain warfare, and the Canadians had fought against 20 German Divisions.

Not to take anything away from the Canadian forces who fought in Hong Kong, Dieppe, Normandy, Holland, Belgium and the Rhineland,

but the Canadian veterans of the Sicilian and Italian campaigns, they deserve much more recognition than they have ever been given. The purpose of this video has been to put their achievements into perspective.