

The Gothic Line

THE GOTHIC LINE

CANADA'S MONTH OF HELL IN WORLD WAR II ITALY

MARK ZUEHLKE

DOUGLAS & MCINTYRE
Vancouver/Toronto/Berkeley

03 04 05 06 07 5 4 3 2 1

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Douglas & McIntyre Ltd.
2323 Quebec Street, Suite 201
Vancouver, British Columbia
Canada V5T 4S7
www.douglas-mcintyre.com

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data
Zuehlke, Mark

The Gothic Line : Canada's month of hell in World War II Italy / by Mark Zuehlke.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-55365-023-9

1. World War, 1939–1945—Campaigns—Italy. 2. Canada. Canadian Army—History—World War, 1939–1945. I. Title.
D763.I8Z83 2003 940.54'215 C2003-910595-4

Library of Congress information is available upon request

Editing by Elizabeth McLean
Jacket design by Peter Cocking & Jessica Sullivan
Jacket photograph: NAC PA-173437
Interior design by Peter Cocking
Maps by C. Stuart Daniel/Starshell Maps
Typeset by Rhonda Ganz
Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens
Printed on acid-free paper

All photos were supplied by the National Archives of Canada, and, unless cited, were taken by unspecified Department of National Defence photographers.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Canada

Council for the Arts, the British Columbia Arts Council, and the
Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry
Development Program (BPIDP) for our publishing activities.

It is just a rough hard job, which must be carried through.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

*Oh, what with the wounded, and what with the dead.
And what with the boys, who are swinging the lead.
If this war isn't over, and that goddamn soon,
There'll be nobody left in this bloody platoon.*

UNKNOWN CANADIAN SOLDIER IN ITALY

I can't see us getting out of here alive.

PRIVATE STAN SCISLOWSKI,

PERTH REGIMENT OF CANADA

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PREFACE

THIS IS THE FINAL VOLUME of what has developed into a trilogy of books detailing the experiences of Canadians in the largest, most decisive battles of World War II's Italian campaign. Following the publication of both *Ortona: Canada's Epic World War II Battle* and *The Liri Valley: Canada's World War II Breakthrough to Rome*, an ever growing number of veterans of this long, brutal, and terribly costly campaign contacted me to share their personal memories of the Gothic Line Battle. I have drawn on veteran memories by letter, E-mail correspondence, telephone calls, and personal interviews. The willingness of these old soldiers to frankly discuss what for many was a painfully grim part of their young lives has made these three books possible. It is their ability to vividly recall many details—sifted together with the official records, regimental diaries and official histories, autobiographies and biographies, and other archival materials—that enabled a dramatic and detailed depiction of the combat experience of Canadians at the Gothic Line during the late summer of 1944.

Some military historians are skeptical of incorporating veteran memory into the examination of battle. This skepticism becomes most keenly honed when one is asking a person to reach back across the span of almost a lifetime. Such historians tend to argue that it is only to the official records that we can turn for accurate accounts of events. Another, generally smaller number of historians turn only to the oral history of those who lived through the war—choosing to present in unvarnished form the accounts of veterans, without placing these experiences into the larger historical context of the battle in which their tale unfolded.

I follow a middle path between these two groups—shaping a detailed narrative of the Canadian experience of battle by weaving together the accounts of veterans and the official record. Such an approach is fraught with its own intrinsic difficulties, the most challenging being how to handle those times when historical record and veteran memory conflict. Fortunately, these situations arise far less than might seem probable at first blush. I have often been amazed at how clearly many veterans recall a specific incident and can peg it to an exact date or even hour. Go back to the official record, particularly the regimental war diaries, and there is a short description that aligns well with the veteran's recollection.

There are, however, times when memory and record do not mesh so cleanly. Most of these instances occur where the perception of regimental honour or the reputation of an individual—most probably a senior officer—might be compromised by the reality of events and behaviour during the course of combat. At such times, the regimental histories and official contemporary military records become suddenly vague or highly sanitized to avoid the hint of aspersion. My approach in these instances is to consult as many sources as possible, both by contacting more veterans who were present at the time and by checking every possible document. This approach usually makes it possible to develop an accurate depiction of how that event transpired. At other times, however, the matter remains obscure and it is necessary to finally make a calculated judgement call as to how a situation likely played out. In these rare circumstances, I have tended to accept veteran memory over the official record, for it is, after all, their story that I present here. The veterans lived through the battle, buried friends who did not, and have carried the memory of war's experience through the rest of their lives.

As the years have passed, memories have generally dimmed. There are few veterans still able to extensively recall the twenty-six days of combat that was the Gothic Line Battle. What they impart are fragments, anecdotal incidents that burned so deeply into consciousness they remain there still. Seldom are these moments that bathe the remembering veteran in a heroic spotlight. That light they

direct elsewhere, onto friends and compatriots they served alongside. Often the memories are humorous, because there is little pain in such stories. These are generally the only tales that veterans will tell wives, children, and grandchildren. When asked—as I have asked—for them to relate the darker events, some refuse, but surprisingly most do their best. One veteran's small fragment linked those of other veterans is then tied together with the historical and official record to yield a credible account. An account that does honour to those who lived through a terrible test of spirit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MY GREATEST THANKS to the many veterans who contributed to this book, all of whom are listed in the bibliography. There are a few, however, who I would like to recognize specifically. Tony Poulin took great care to provide many personal experiences, often translating thoroughly from French to English for my non-bilingual edification the accounts he had written years before. Strome Galloway has been a wonderful, gracious source for the duration of my research work on all three books. John Dougan, Jack Haley, David Kinloch, J. Milton Gregg, and Ted Shuter were also extremely patient and helpful.

At the regimental museums and archives, staff and volunteers were always generous with their time and willing to provide material that otherwise would not have been available. Special thanks to Tony Walters of the Rocky Mountain Rangers and Howard Hisdal of the British Columbia Dragoons. Thanks also to Dr. Steve Harris and others at the Directorate of History, Department of National Defence, staff at the National Archives of Canada, Chris Petter and the two Terrys at University of Victoria's Special Collections, and Debbie Lindsey at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Radio Archives.

In Italy, Amedeo Montemaggi was a wonderful resource and I cannot say enough kind things about Oviglio Monti. Both shared their wartime stories and local knowledge. Monti drove much of the battle-field with me and, when he could not, loaned his car to this virtual stranger from Canada for solo outings. His Hotel Levante in Rimini was a pleasant base for operations. My thanks to his family too, for their help.

Alex McQuarrie translated the German paratrooper Carl Bayerlein's account into English and has always been supportive of my work. Dr. Bill McAndrew pointed me to several valuable sources and provided sound counsel on other matters of relevance. Ken McLeod previously opened many doors to the homes of veterans in Vancouver and kindly shared his oral history collection with me.

Literary agent Carolyn Swayze worked very hard on my behalf, making it possible for me to focus on the research and writing while she dealt with the burdensome contractual and financial complexities that sometimes seemed destined to sink this entire project. That it is here today is in no small measure due to her efforts. As was the case with my other two books on the Italian campaign, Stuart Daniel contributed his mapmaking excellence and Elizabeth McLean her precise editorial eye. Finally, I have been fortunate indeed to have the support and companionship of Frances Backhouse, *more*.

The Italian Campaign

10 July 1943 – 22 Sept 1944

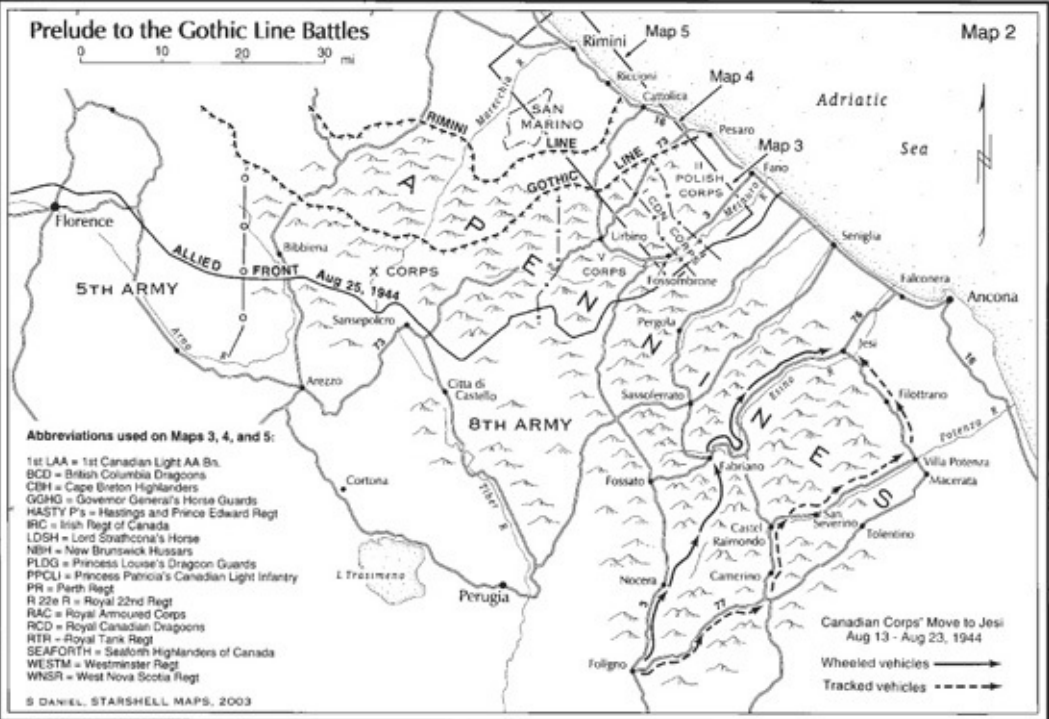
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S. DANIEL, 2003

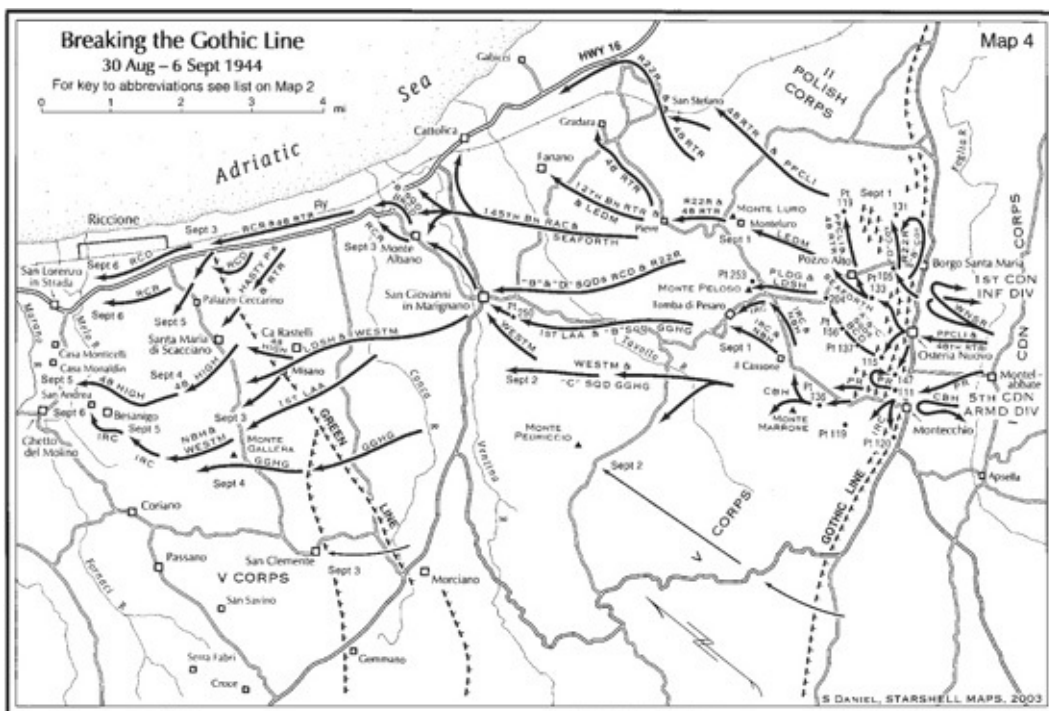
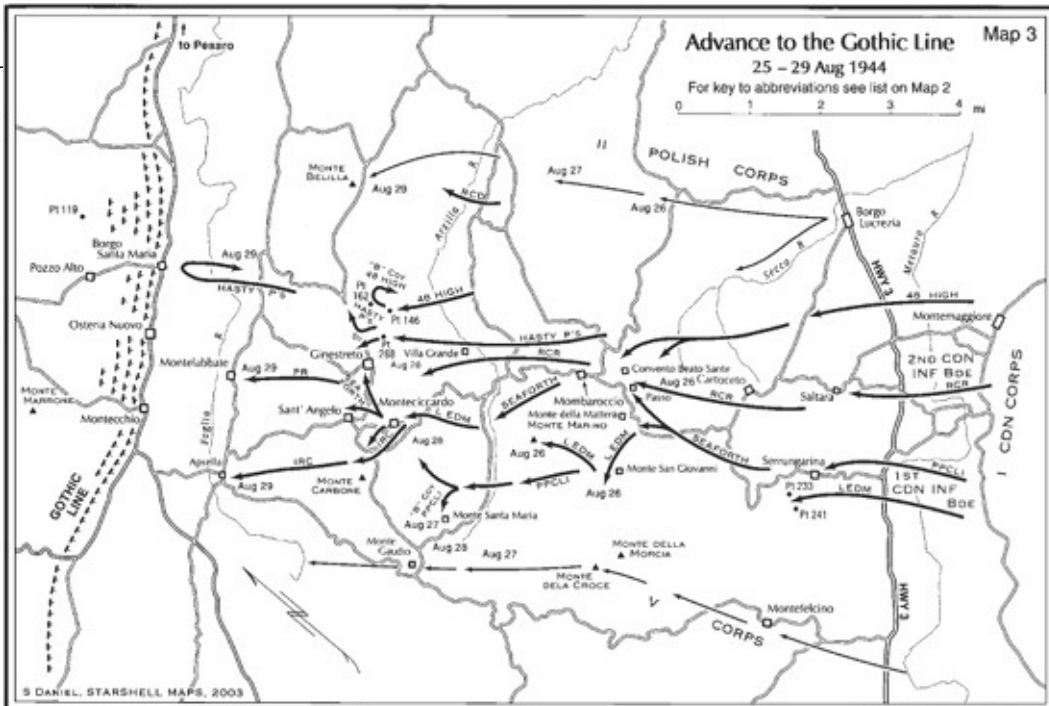
Prelude to the Gothic Line Battles

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- Abbreviations used on Maps 3, 4, and 5:**
- 1st LAA = 1st Canadian Light AA Bn.
 - BCD = British Columbia Dragons
 - CBH = Cape Breton Highlanders
 - GGHG = Governor General's Horse Guards
 - HASTY P's = Hastings and Prince Edward Regt
 - IRC = Irish Regt of Canada
 - LDSH = Lord Strathcona's Horse
 - NBH = New Brunswick Hussars
 - PLDG = Princess Louise's Dragon Guards
 - PPCLI = Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
 - PR = Perth Regt
 - R 22e R = Royal 22nd Regt
 - RAC = Royal Armoured Corps
 - RCD = Royal Canadian Dragoons
 - RTR = Royal Tank Regt
 - SEAFORTH = Seaforth Highlanders of Canada
 - WESTM = Westminster Regt
 - WNSR = West Nova Scotia Regt

S. DANIEL, STARSHHELL MAPS, 2003





The Advance to Rimini

13 - 21 Sept 1944

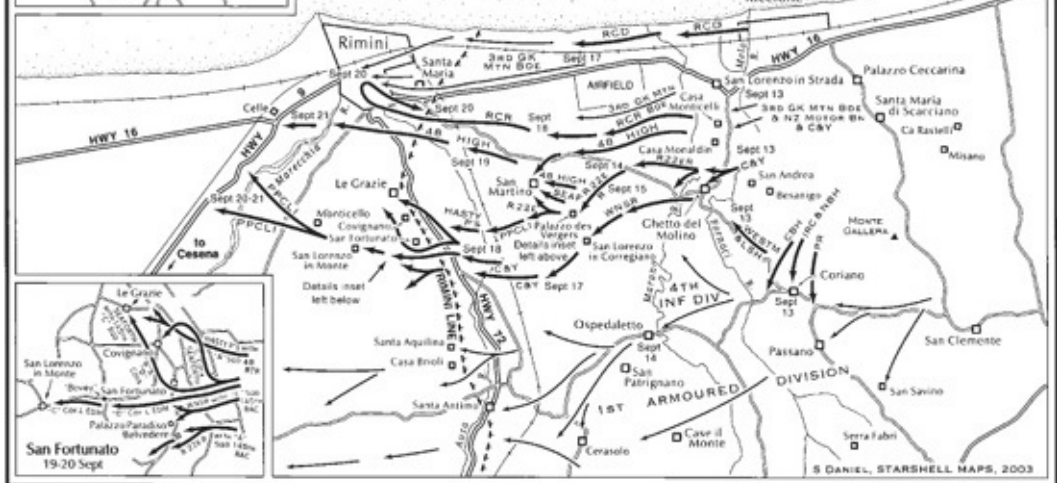
Map 5

Adriatic

Sea



For key to abbreviations see list on Map 2



S DANIEL, STARHELL MAPS, 2003

Long March To the Gothic Line

THEY WERE the forgotten soldiers. Some thought themselves forsaken. They marched amid an Allied army in a Canadian corps that had largely disappeared from the consciousness of Canadians back home. “Where are you? We never hear about you in the newspapers!” was a common refrain in letters received from parents, siblings, wives, and lovers. The short, grim answer: “In Italy.”

For almost a year, until early June 1944, the eyes of the Western world had been rivetted on the slow, bloody Allied advance up Italy’s long, hard boot to Rome. On June 6, 1944—D-Day—history’s largest armada hove to off the shores of Normandy and a great amphibious invasion gained the Allies a decisive toehold in northern France. D-Day transformed the Western European theatre of combat. Once it had been thought that the outcome of the Western Allied war against the Axis powers might depend on driving up the length of Italy to pierce into Austria, and then break into Germany through the back door north of Vienna. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called this the offensive against “Europe’s soft underbelly.”

Italy had, however, proven to be more hard, sinewy muscle than tender tissue. An unforgiving land divided in the centre by the Apennines, crisscrossed by ravines and spiny ridges, Italy was ideal for defence and hostile to the offence. In summer, it was sun-scorched and dust-choked; in winter, drenching rains transformed the soil into a muddy quagmire. Despite the terrain, the Allies in Italy had slowly, relentlessly prevailed.

From the Canadian perspective, the Italian campaign had served initially as a proving ground for an army largely untested. Although by early 1942 Canada had deployed 465,000 soldiers to Britain, none had undergone a baptism of fire. While thousands of British soldiers fought and died in North Africa, the Canadians in Britain trained and waited for a great invasion of Western Europe that drew no closer with each passing season. Between training schemes, they drank, went sightseeing, fell in love with and married British women, and fathered children. Along with growing numbers of Americans, they behaved somewhat like an occupation force. “The problem with the Americans,” went a British saying of the day, “is they’re overpaid, oversexed, and over here.” Canadians were only slightly more popular.

On August 19, 1942, the Canadians finally did fight. Operation Jubilee was an amphibious raid on the small French port of Dieppe. Of the 6,000-strong attacking force, 4,963 were Canadians. Jubilee was a disaster. In a matter of hours, the attackers were cut to pieces on the beaches. Only 2,210 Canadians returned to Britain and 28 of these died of wounds. Of the rest, 807 were killed during the battle and 82 of the 1,946 taken prisoner of war perished while in captivity.

Rather than dampen Canadian military ardour, Dieppe fuelled the growing demand at home that Canada’s army get into the fight. The government agreed and saw its opportunity when Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily, was proposed in early 1943. Initially, no Canadian units were assigned to the operation. But the Canadian government lobbied hard and the Combined Chiefs of Staff finally agreed to attach 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade to the British Eighth Army for the invasion.

On July 10, 1943, the Canadians waded ashore on the extreme tip of the Pachino peninsula, Sicily’s southernmost point. From here, they marched 130 miles, fought several small, fierce engagements, and took 2,310 casualties. Of these, 562 died and 490 were buried in a small Canadian-only cemetery on the outskirts of Agira in the hardscrabble Sicilian interior. It was at Agira and nearby Leonforte—

two dun-coloured mediaeval hilltop fortress towns—that a majority of the Canadian casualties were suffered.

Sicily served as a stepping-stone for an invasion of Italy. It was an invasion the British wanted and the Americans agreed to only half-heartedly, fearful such a campaign would weaken the Allied ability to proceed with the invasion of Western Europe. Canada wanted to be in the fight, if there was to be one. On September 3, Eighth Army crossed the Strait of Messina with the Canadian veterans of Sicily leading the way.

Even as these Canadians started the long trek up the Italian boot, plans were underway in Ottawa to expand the Canadian presence in Italy from a mere division and brigade to a full, entirely Canadian corps. By November 1, I Canadian Corps was a reality brought into the strength of Eighth Army. It comprised the seasoned troops of 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade as well as the newly arrived 5th Canadian Armoured Division. By the end of 1943, about 75,000 Canadians were in Italy, including the many support personnel necessary to keep a corps operational.

The 5th Canadian Armoured Division was spared the first prolonged Canadian battle in Italy. From December 6, 1943 to January 4, 1944, 1 CID and 1 CAB slugged it out with the elite 90th Panzer Grenadier and 1st Parachute divisions for control of a few miles of ground extending from the Moro River to just beyond the Adriatic port town of Ortona. The Moro River, Villa Rogatti, San Leonardo, Casa Berardi, Cider Crossroads, The Gully, Torre Muchia, and Ortona became battle honours for the regiments engaged at each place. Inside Ortona, an eight-day street battle between the German paratroopers and the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, and the Three Rivers Tank Regiment was one of the most intense and costly battles ever fought by Canadian soldiers. At month's end, 2,339 Canadians were casualties, including 502 dead.

Although Ortona fell, the broader offensive that had brought about the fight for this town stalled in the face of Italy's intense winter rains. The mud reduced the battlefield to one eerily reminiscent of the Great War trench lines found in Belgium's Flanders. On the Adriatic coast, Eighth Army was stalemated. Across the Apennines, the U.S. Fifth Army was even more hopelessly deadlocked before the heavily fortified Gustav Line, which ran from the impregnable Benedictine monastery atop Monte Cassino across the Liri Valley to the mountains of the coast.

Repeatedly during the winter of 1943–44, the Americans tried to break through this line. The casualties incurred in these failed attacks were devastating. An attempt to outflank the Gustav Line by launching an amphibious landing sixty miles to its rear at Anzio on January 22, 1944 resulted in VI U.S. Corps, a combined American-British force, being trapped inside a narrow, perilous beachhead. By spring, the situation on the Italian west coast was bleak and even the shifting of an entire corps from Eighth Army to this front had failed to yield a breakthrough.

General Harold Alexander, Deputy Supreme Commander, Mediterranean, decided that victory in Italy would only come on the west coast. To achieve such a victory, he needed the combined strength of his two armies. Accordingly, I Canadian Corps marched west in April to face the Liri Valley. Its role in the forthcoming Operation Diadem was to be a decisive one—the gatecrashers, who would spearhead the Allied charge up the fertile Liri Valley towards Rome. On May 11, the great offensive began with British infantry divisions and armoured brigades, including 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade, punching a hole in the Gustav Line. This time, the German fortifications were breached. By May 18, 1st Canadian Infantry Division approached the next defensive line—the formidable Hitler Line. After a series of costly failed attempts to break the line with hasty attacks, a set-piece attack was launched on May 23. For 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, fighting on the division's right flank, this was the single most costly day of battle. By day's end, 160 of its men were dead, 438 wounded, and 7

either missing or lost as prisoners. On the left flank, however, 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade's Carleton and York Regiment had broken through. The brigade soon opened a narrow gap through which 5th Canadian Armoured Division's lead elements squeezed.

Even while withdrawing, the Germans mounted a fierce resistance that denied Alexander a quick advance and foiled his plan to link up with the Allied divisions breaking out of the Anzio beachhead, thus encircling and then crushing the retreating enemy divisions. Despite the unfaltering bravery of Canadian units such as the Westminster (Motorized) Regiment and the Lord Strathcona's Horse reconnaissance unit, which jointly won and held a bridgehead across the Melfa River on May 24, the advance faltered. When U.S. Fifth Army commander General Mark Clark independently changed the axis of his advance to ensure American divisions reached Rome first, the German divisions successfully melted away. Although mauled, they regrouped, refitted, and returned to the fight as they had so often in the past.

The Allies had incurred terrible casualties during May 1944. The Fifth and Eighth armies collectively suffered 43,746 casualties in exchange for losses estimated at slightly more than 50,000 on the German side. Of these Germans, 24,334 were taken prisoner. Total Canadian battle casualties during this time were 3,368: 789 killed, 2,463 wounded, and 116 missing. Illness incapacitated a further 4,000.

Although Clark undertook a triumphal parade into Rome on June 4, the victory was hollow. It was rendered even more so two days later by Operation Overlord, which put thousands of troops ashore on beaches in Normandy. The Germans in Italy, meanwhile, slowly withdrew northward towards yet another heavily fortified defensive line that stretched from south of Rimini on the Adriatic coast to Pisa on the western coast.

Even as the Canadians moved into rest camps in the Volturno Valley, southeast of the Liri Valley, and started refitting and rebuilding the corps, everyone from general to private knew another major offensive must soon follow. Many who had been part of the campaign since Sicily believed death or a debilitating wound inevitable before the fighting in Italy would finally end. It was during this time in the rest camps that these soldiers first heard themselves referred to as D-Day Dodgers.

According to the instant legend that grew up around this intended aspersion, Britain's first female Member of Parliament, Lady Nancy Astor, directed the derogatory term their way because she thought the soldiers in Italy enjoyed an easy war compared to those fighting in Normandy. Derogation was quickly transformed into mark of honour, as the men in Italy made up various versions of a song. "We are the D-Day Dodgers" was sung to the tune of "Lili Marlene." As the campaign continued, new verses were added, but in the early summer of 1944 the most common Canadian version ran five simple verses.

*We are the D-Day Dodgers, out in Italy,
Always on the vino, always on the spree.
Eighth Army skivers and their tanks,
We go to war in tie and slacks,
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 the 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 really didn't fight there, we went there for the ride.
Sleeping 'til noon and playing games,
We live in Rome with lots of dames.
We are the D-Day Dodgers, in sunny Italy.*

*We are the D-Day Dodgers, way out in Italy.
We're always tight, we cannot fight.
What bloody use are we?*

*If you look around the mountains and through mud and rain,
You'll see the rows of crosses, some which bear no name.
Heartbreak and toils and suffering gone,
The boys beneath, they linger on.
They were some of the D-Day Dodgers,
And they're still in Italy.*

Some of the Canadians marched to this song as I Canadian Corps returned to active operations in the middle of July. The corps marched towards Florence for what was an anticipated major offensive in the central Apennines against the Gothic Line. Within a month, I Canadian Corps was—as it had been in the Liri Valley—again tasked with the primary role in a decisive Allied offensive. It fell to the Canadians to spearhead the breakthrough of the Gothic Line. This is the story of that bitter and costly battle.

PART ONE

RETURN TO THE ADRIATIC

FROM INSIDE the Galileo Observatory, Major Strome Galloway, Royal Canadian Regiment second-in-command, gazed down upon the great spires and domes of Florence's multitude of cathedrals, churches, and abbeys. The gentle, muted Tuscan light cast the city's elegant buildings in soft hues of terra cotta and dappled the broad, slow-flowing waters of the Arno River—almost directly below—with sparks of gold. Spanning the river was a single bridge—the fourteenth-century Ponte Vecchio—and this reminded Galloway that he looked down upon the city not as a tourist but as a soldier.¹

Just prior to 1st Canadian Infantry Division's August 5–6 move into the line fronting the Arno River, the engineers of the German 4th Parachute Division had blown the city's five other ancient bridges. Among those destroyed was Santa Trinità, completed in 1569 and supported by a revolutionary, near vertical, elliptical-shaped arch system. The bridge design was believed to have been sketched by Michelangelo, but the master architect and sculptor Bartolomeo Ammanati had completed the actual construction. Now the renowned arches, upon whose scientific design bridges around the world had been based, were just so many heaps of debris lying in the river between the piers that had supported them for centuries. Even Ponte Vecchio had not escaped unscathed. Although the two- and three-storey tall shops that formed the bridge's distinctive outer walls and confined its crossing span to a narrow lane barely wide enough for an ox cart to pass through appeared intact, the approaches and the buildings that had fronted these had all been demolished. This rendered the bridge virtually impassable.

The destruction of the bridges and approaches seemed an unnecessary act of vandalism. Ostensibly, Florence was an open city, so declared by both the Germans and Allies in order to prevent its many architectural and other historic and artistic treasures being damaged. Having declared that “the whole city of Florence must rank as a work of art of the first importance,” the Allies had taken pains to spare the city aerial or artillery bombardment.² Front-line troops were unable to shell obvious German targets and were restricted to the use of only rifles and machine guns. Discharging their projector infantry anti-tank (PIAT) launchers or mortars was strictly prohibited.³

Targets there were aplenty. Not two feet from where Galloway stood, the colossal barrel of the observatory's main telescope had been fully depressed and was being used by a Royal Canadian Regiment soldier to scour the streets and buildings for signs of the enemy. Unaware that the telescope's astrally intentioned optics pinned them as neatly as butterflies mounted on a collector's board, German paratroopers sauntered down streets hundreds of yards north of the Arno in tempting bunches that a salvo of mortar or artillery fire would savage. Although they reported the targets, no clearances for such shoots resulted. So the men in the observatory contented themselves primarily with using the telescope for sightseeing, including detailed examinations of the intricately lavish facades of Florence's trove of Renaissance buildings.⁴

Sometimes they used the telescope to monitor the goings-on of the other regiments holding the ten-mile-long Canadian sector. Immediately to the RCR's right, the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment—a fellow 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade unit—was positioned. To the rear of the brigade's two forward regiments, the 48th Highlanders of Canada stood in reserve. Beyond the Hasty P's were the regiments of 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade: the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and the Loyal Edmonton regiments. Farther south, and out of view of the telescope because of intervening hills, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade stood some distance

back from Florence to serve as divisional reserve.

After the bloody fighting in the Liri Valley, the division's veterans welcomed the quiet of this battleground. Since the end of the Liri Valley Battle in early June, the division had been refitting, reorganizing, and conducting training exercises to integrate newly arrived reinforcements, but the soldiers remained battle-weary. For the reinforcements, however, the sporadic German shelling, searching machine-gun fire, and sniper activity served as their first introduction to combat. The veterans were quick to remind any reinforcement unnerved by these minor hazards that they were fortunate their first taste of war occurred in such a "peaceful" setting.⁵

Not that the front was entirely inactive. Around the clock could be heard the fitful chatter of machine guns and the crack of rifles. Down along the riverbank, Canadians and Germans traded gunfire on a regular, if desultory, basis. Snipers from both sides posed a constant threat. When a German sniper killed a soldier in the Hasty P's, the regiment's snipers were duly unleashed to exact revenge. A deadly game of cat-and-mouse in this built-up area followed until the German sniper was killed.⁶

When the Loyal Edmonton Regiment had entered the line, it relieved the 2nd New Zealand Division's 28th Maori Battalion. During the hand-off, Edmonton commander Acting Lieutenant Colonel Jim Stone noted that the Maoris had loaded their trucks with a vast stock of ladies' shoes that they obviously intended for barter with civilians. Stone later visited a large villa with an eye to turning it into his headquarters. An American woman, who had married an Italian prior to the war, answered the door. The woman embarked immediately on a tirade about the indignities she had suffered by having to house "black people." Stone, suspecting that she and her husband were a couple of closet fascists, cut her off in mid-sentence and harshly lectured the woman about the Maoris and her own questionable Allied patriotism. "Who's your superior officer?" she demanded. Stone declared, "Madam, there's no officer in the world superior to me."⁷

That evening, the ever aggressive Stone ordered fighting patrols from 'A' and 'D' companies across the shallow Arno to test the 4th Parachute Division's alertness. One of the patrols bumped into some paratroopers and a firefight ensued that left Lieutenant J.C. Butler and two other ranks dead. Another three men were wounded.⁸

The next day, Stone was notified that the Edmontons' stay in the line was to be a short one. Even other regiments from 2 CIB were still taking up positions in the front lines, Stone was out with a reconnaissance party to find a staging area for the Edmontons' forthcoming move to the rear. The party used the regiment's pioneer and engineering platoon's jeeps, one of which towed a trailer loaded with beehive bombs. Containing powerful plastic explosives, these bombs were beehive shaped to focus the blast against the wall of concrete pillboxes or other structures.

Stone told Captain R.S. Stephens and a lanky private named J.A. Foster to take the jeep with the trailer and check the suitability of some nearby buildings for concealing the regiment's vehicles. Stone then carried on in another jeep. He was about a half-mile down the road when a mighty explosion came from behind him. Stone U-turned and raced back. In the middle of the road was a house-sized hole. All he could see of the jeep and trailer was a jeep wheel lying on top of a nearby roof. Several Italians were wandering around dazed, with bleeding arms. Stone asked an old woman what happened.

"Tall boy, *minnen*," she replied, indicating that Foster had tripped a mine.

For the first time, Stone noticed stacks of Italian box mines lying alongside the road. A small wooden box packed with explosives, such mines detonated if the closed lid was opened. Alternatively,

the detonator could be rigged to explode if an open lid was closed. Set up in this way, the mine could be buried in a road and any vehicle running over it would slam the lid shut and detonate the mine.

Foster had taken a mine and, while standing on top of the trailer containing the beehive mines, had opened one to examine the box's contents. The exploding mine had set off the entire stock of beehives. Stone thought a half-ton of explosive had gone off at once.

Stephens's body was lying nearby, head and one leg blown off. Of Foster nothing remained but some hair and little bits of flesh. No trace of his identity tags could be found. Stone's men gathered what they could of the private in a pail. "We called it Foster and buried him," Stone said later.⁹

ON AUGUST 7, the day after the RCR moved into the line, 'A' Company was mortared. Major Sam Liddell, Lieutenant F.K. Wildfang, Regimental Sergeant Major D.P. Duffey, and several other men were wounded. The incident was a stark reminder that Florence's comparatively modern southern outskirts were not to be spared the destruction of German mortaring and shelling. Still, they were somewhat judicious about the selection of targets. The RCR's headquarters was a modern villa no more than nine hundred yards from the river. Despite the constant comings and goings that clearly betrayed the building's current use, the villa drew no German fire. Galloway was glad of this, for it was a lovely sixty-four-room mansion with so many lavishly comfortable bedrooms that most of the regimental staff had one to themselves.¹⁰ A huge four-poster bed all but filled Galloway's bedroom. There was also "an immense wall portrait of a luscious nude reclining with all her ample charms revealed in full, living colour. The bathroom next door was the sunken pool variety in a beautiful marble environment, with erotic artwork to beguile the sensuous mind." There was also a library with "thousands of books, hundreds of them in English."¹¹

The four staff officers took their meals "at a mammoth dining room with high-backed baronial chairs which gave the necessary post-prandial panache, as we sipped our cheap *vino rosso*, pretending in our minds, though not with our palates, that it was the best port."¹²

Galloway wished life on the Florence front would not end too soon.

Not only the headquarters' staff enjoyed luxurious accommodations. Line companies were also comfortably fixed. 'A' Company was established in a Medici palace dating back to 1430, while 'B' Company occupied Aldous Huxley's Florence residence.¹³

Scout platoon commander Lieutenant Jimmy Quayle thought this the strangest war he had yet seen. Having waded ashore in Sicily, having survived Ortona and the Liri Valley, and having been twice wounded, he was a seasoned campaigner. Yet he had never before attempted to conduct surreptitious scouting operations on a riverbank opposite German positions while, all around his furtively moving scouts, Florentines thronged the streets, totally unconcerned for their personal safety. Stunningly attractive women wearing bright print dresses strolled with typical Italian haughtiness past Quayle as he crouched in a shop doorway for protection.

The peaceful atmosphere was illusory. When Quayle was on the verge of joining the throngs—rather than creeping along like the cautious combat veteran he was—there was the sudden scream of an incoming shell. As the smoke rolled up from the street, women, children, and old men lay on the cobblestones bleeding and dying before his eyes. An hour or two later, the casualties had been picked up, the street washed clean, and the Florentines meandered again with careless abandon. Soon a shot was fired from a nearby apartment building roof and someone pitched dead to the sidewalk. This time everyone fled for cover, but they didn't stay there long.

This urban battleground's surrealism made it hard for the soldiers to keep vigilant. One of Quayle

men got shot in the upper arm while carelessly looting a camera store situated on the Arno's south bank in plain view of the Germans. When Quayle visited him at the Regimental Aid Post, the painstricken soldier grinned at him sheepishly. "That was a kind of dumb thing I did," he said.¹⁴

Quayle knew that the man meant getting shot was dumb, not the act of looting. In impoverished Sicily and southern Italy, there had been little worth taking, except food and wine. The pickings improved greatly, however, once the Canadians marched north of Rome. Although army regulations prohibited looting, Eighth Army's military police and most of its officers generally turned a blind eye so long as the thievery was kept somewhat in check. Suffering a chronic shortage of reinforcements, commanders were loath to send men off to the stockades for such infractions as looting.

Captain Howard Mitchell of the Saskatoon Light Infantry—the regiment that provided heavy machine-gun, 4.2-inch mortar, and anti-aircraft gun support to 1 CID—spent his second day on the Florence front censoring his company's mail. Usually this consisted of simple letters home. This day however, there was a small stack of identically sized small soft parcels. Dismayed at the thought of unwrapping and rewrapping each package, he simply franked them all and sent them off uninspected. The next day, a virtually identical stack of small parcels awaited his attention.

Mitchell demanded an explanation from the company sergeant major, who shrugged and said, "The boys found a warehouse of silk, Sir. They are sending some of it home." Mitchell offered no rebuke; he only wished he had procured some of the silk for himself.¹⁵

Soldiers didn't just limit themselves to stealing civilian property. En route to Florence, 1 CID had debussed near Siena and advanced to the front in a series of night marches in order to avoid detection by enemy spies. Night marches were unpopular because the men could only rest during the day and many, like Quayle, found it impossible to sleep when the sun was up. This was particularly true in the intense Italian summer heat. A couple of days into the march, Quayle was so tired he discovered that was possible to catnap while actually marching, so long as he ensured that one of his men reined him in whenever he wandered off the road towards the ditch.

If the scouts only had a jeep, he lamented, they could take turns sleeping in the jeep and marching. The day after the RCR relieved the South African Division in Florence, some of his men appeared with a rattletrap jeep. "Found it, Sir," the sergeant in charge of the group said, totally deadpan. One man pointed at the jeep. "Someone has even filed off all the markings, Sir. Must have been stolen."

Quayle said gravely, "Must have been. No doubt at all." Quayle soon delighted in driving by foot-bound RCR captains and majors while he, a mere lieutenant, possessed a private limousine.¹⁶

QUAYLE WAS CAREFUL to stay out of areas of Florence where Italian anti-Fascists and Fascists were still fighting each other. For in the midst of the conventional war being fought by the Allies and the Germans, there waged a fierce guerilla war.

On July 25, 1943, the Italian government's Grand Council had arrested Benito Mussolini and reinstated the monarchical regime under King Vittorio Emanuele III. The king empowered seventy-one-year-old Marshal Pietro Badoglio, a suddenly reformed ex-Fascist, to form a new government and officially dissolved the Fascist Party. Realizing their Italian ally was planning to capitulate to the Allies, the Germans had immediately imposed an occupation force. On September 8, Italy had surrendered and the king, Badoglio, and other key members of the government fled Rome to avoid imprisonment. Boarding a ship at Ortona in the early morning hours of September 11, they escaped to a port behind the advancing Allied front lines.

The next day, German paratroopers, under command of SS Hauptsturmführer Otto Skorzeny, freed

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