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**Hai Visto I Canadesi? : A Study of the Social Interactions Between Canadian Soldiers and Italian
Civilians Before, During, and After the Battle of Ortona**

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between Canadian Soldiers and Italian Civilians before, during,
and after the Battle of Ortona**

by

Zachary David Cavasin

Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the MA degree in History

Department of History
Faculty of Arts
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Abstract

Zachary David Cavasin

Dr. Serge Durflinger

University of Ottawa, 2010

This thesis is the first study to examine Canadian and Italian interactions in Ortona from December 1943 until April 1944. The Canadian presence in Ortona is not remembered by the people of the town simply in the context of military operations. As the Canadians occupied Ortona and the surrounding areas for four months, interactions occurred within the context of combat operations, periods of relaxation, and throughout the process of rebuilding infrastructure and developing an economy. Canadian military historians have largely neglected to provide accounts of the various engagements between Canadian soldiers and Italian civilians before, during, and after the Battle of Ortona, unless they affected operations, intelligence, and civil control. The result of these civil-military relationships provided numerous benefits to Canadian and Italian alike. Italians provided Canadian soldiers with intelligence, shelter, food, and psychological support. In turn, the Canadians provided the Italians with medical assistance, food, financial support, and technical support in the rebuilding of Ortona. The interactions promoted Canadians as separate from the other Allied forces in the region and created unique friendships that defined the liberator and the liberated through their mutual dependencies. As historians have focused entirely on the unfolding of military operations in the region of Ortona, this thesis argues that the value of the interactions and the reconstruction process help explain why most Ortonesesi developed a positive collective memory of Canadian soldiers.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AMG	Allied Military Government
AMGOT.....	Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories
CO.....	Commanding Officer
P.P.C.L.I.....	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
VD.....	Venereal Disease

Introduction

On 28 December 1943, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada reported that they had encountered no enemy forces in Ortona, Italy.¹ After eight days of consecutive fighting the town was firmly in Canadian hands. Yet the soldiers who had survived the battle were not alone. Throughout the day, hundreds of Italian civilians began to emerge from the rubble. Twenty-one year old Tommaso Carceni was among them. As Carceni walked amongst the ruins, he encountered a patrol of Canadian soldiers, who promptly gave him some porridge to eat. Having not eaten in days, Carceni wasted no time in devouring what was given to him. This was his first encounter with his liberators and, seven decades later, this moment continues to influence his impressions of Canadians and Canadian soldiers.²

This thesis unveils an unexplored aspect of Canada's history. Canadian veterans continue to remember the Italian civilians that they liberated, but an understanding of why the people of Ortona – the Ortonesi – acquired positive impressions of the Canadians has never been provided. The approach to studying the Canadians' presence in Ortona has always focused on the significance of the battle, and those sacrifices should never be forgotten. Yet there is more than one side of the coin when it comes to Canada's role in Ortona. By studying the social interactions between Canadian soldiers and the Ortonesi and by outlining the process that was initiated to rebuild Ortona, this thesis shows that the positive impressions formed of the Canadians by the Ortonesi derives more from how the Canadians approached the Ortonesi after the battle than what they did during it. By looking

¹ Loyal Edmonton Regiment, Active Service Force War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, RG-24-C-3, Volume 15114, 28 December 1943, Library and Archives Canada (LAC); Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, Active Service Force War Diaries 1943/06-1944, RG-24-C-3, Volume 15256, 28 December 1943, LAC.

² Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

at the Canadians' presence in Ortona from the viewpoints of both the Canadian soldiers and the Ortonesi, this thesis offers a unique perspectives on the impressions of the liberators by the liberated. Some of the literature on Canadian soldiers interactions with liberated civilians has presented a negative perception of the relationships that formed. Sean Longden's *To the Victor the Spoils*, focuses almost exclusively on crimes perpetrated by Canadian soldiers against French and Belgian civilians.³ Other sources, like Jeffery Keshen's *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* contains specific references to the looting of Italian property by Canadians in Rimini.⁴ Neither author provides examples of the initiatives the Canadian Army undertook to aid the civilian populations that they liberated or the perspectives that developed of the Canadians by liberated civilians. This thesis does not stray from the validity that some Canadian soldiers did perpetrate crimes against Italian civilians and their property. Yet the author uncovered numerous references to positive encounters between the Canadians and the Ortonesi. As a result of these findings, this thesis offers a more balanced representation of the interactions between Canadians and Italians, by illustrating both parties' experiences with, and perspectives of, each other.

The importance of the perspectives of the liberated and the liberator highlight the bonds that were formed between the Ortonesi and Canadian soldiers. These bonds have existed since December 1943, but have never been emphasized. This thesis examines the many different types of interactions that occurred between Canadian soldiers and the Ortonesi in and around Ortona, before, during, and after the battle and how these exerted an impact on the people of Ortona.

³Sean Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils D-Day To VE Day the Reality behind the Heroism*, (Gloucestershire: Arris Publishing Limited, 2004)

⁴ Jeff Keshen, *Saints Sinners and Soldiers Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: University of British Colombia Press, 2004), 249.

Readers of Canadian military history who had sought to learn about the impressions formed by the Ortonesi of their Canadian liberators or the role formal and informal interactions between soldiers and civilians played in shaping their recollections and mutual relations would be disappointed. There is no literature on the subject. The Canadians occupied the region from the end of December 1943 until late April 1944, yet there are only scattered accounts of how the Ortonesi interacted with their liberators, the roles played by the Canadian Army in rebuilding Ortona, and the impressions left by the Canadians on the Italians. The focus of historical research has overwhelmingly focused on the tactical and strategic dimensions of the Italian campaign. The gaps left in our understanding of these interactions were the result of the importance given during the war to the tactical information acquired during combat operations, the sources that were used in writing the official histories of the Canadian Army in the Italian Campaign, and the scholarly trends that were established from these initial writings.

The responsibility for developing and preserving the records of the Canadian Army during the Second World War fell to the Canadian Army Historical Section in London under the command of Colonel Charles Perry Stacey. Under his supervision, the main objective of the Canadian Army Historical Section was to preserve pertinent documentation and develop historical narratives for the postwar writing of an official history of the Canadian Army during the conflict. The information provided for the narratives was almost solely based on combat operations, and mainly derived from regimental war diaries, historical officer field reports, and Canadian Military Headquarters operational reports. The information provided by these initial sources helped develop the combat capabilities of soldiers fighting in Italy

and prepare those who were still waiting to be deployed.⁵ For example, the knowledge gained from the 1st Canadian Infantry Division's Battle of Ortona reports was being used by Allied armies for training purposes.⁶ Italian impressions of the Canadians and interactions between the two groups served no practical purpose in developing the tactical expertise of Canadian soldiers. Nor did historical officers view soldiers' experiences with Italian civilians as warranting any particular reference in their works.⁷ Although some regimental war diaries offer a level of insight on encounters between Canadian soldiers and Italian civilians, such accounts are only provided in conjunction with a description of combat operations or the periods in which the regiment visited Ortona's leave facilities.⁸

The personal experiences of soldiers during combat or on leave were rarely used by historical officers since those who attempted to interview soldiers found that most troops, seemed irritated or exhausted after combat and were not particularly interested in recording their impressions for posterity. Others could not recall the operations in which they had participated and historical officers found no practical use for detailed accounts of soldiers' activities during authorized leave. As such, Stacey and his team gathered the majority of their information from senior officers rather than from the infantrymen and focused on illustrating the strategic or operational picture of war rather than personal experiences.⁹ Even after visiting Ortona in March 1944, Stacey made no reference to the personal experiences of either the Italians or the Canadian soldiers he may have encountered or the reconstruction

⁵ Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writings of the World Wars* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 93-103.

⁶ Operations of 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade in Italy 25 Nov 1943 – 4 Jan 1944, Report No. 165, 92, RG-24, Volume 6920, LAC.

⁷ Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, 97.

⁸ The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada War Diaries 1943/06-1944, 18 December 1943, LAC. The entry provides an example of Italian civilians providing intelligence on the positions of mines along the road south of Ortona.

⁹ Cook, 102 and 111.

initiatives he may have witnessed during his visit.¹⁰ These oversights had a detrimental impact on the writing of Canada's non-combat, but still important participation in the Italian Campaign.

The official works that developed from the historical officers' reports, Canadian Military Headquarters reports, and the war diaries of the regiments of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade followed a similar pattern of mainly focusing on combat operations. The first was a small book entitled *From Pachino to Ortona: The Canadian Campaign in Sicily and Italy 1943*, published in 1944. The objective of this publication was to "afford Canadians with more information than had previously been published concerning the operations of their Army in the Second World War," the booklet utilized paintings by the official war artists, photos from the Canadian Army Overseas Film and Photo Units, regimental war diaries, and historical section field reports.¹¹ But the images were of senior officers, common soldiers on official duty, and the destruction that followed combat. Moreover, *From Panchino to Ortona* only provided information up to the end of the battle of Ortona and thus did not cover the full scope of the Canadians' presence in the town. Since combat operations were ongoing after the battle, the Canadian Historical Section no doubt saw more value in documenting the sharp end of war.

What followed in 1948 was an official historical summary by Stacey entitled *The Canadian Army 1939-1945. The Canadian Army 1939-1945*, "attempt[ed] in a broad outline to tell the story of the Canadian Army as a whole."¹² Stacey reported in the April 1948 edition of the *Canadian Army Journal* that the book "represented an interim report and not a

¹⁰ C.P Stacey, *A Date with History: Memoirs of a Canadian Historian* (Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, 1983), 131.

¹¹ Canadian Army Historical Section, *From Pachino To Ortona: The Canadian Campaign in Sicily and Italy 1943* (Ottawa: Published by Authority of the Minister of National Defence, 1944), Introduction.

¹² C.P Stacey, *The Canadian Army 1939-1945: An Official Historical Summary* (Ottawa: Published by Authority of the Minister of National Defence, 1948), ix.

history, as it is too brief to tell the whole story of the Canadian Army.”¹³ In regards to illustrating the Canadians presence in Ortona, *The Canadian Army 1939-1945* used the same sources as *From Pachino to Ortona* with the addition of captured German military records. These enemy records provided Stacey with the capacity to write a stronger operational overview of the battle, this publication, too, made no references to encounters between Italians and Canadians and referred to Ortona only as a place of rest and relaxation in the months that followed the battle.¹⁴

The last work pertaining to the Italian Campaign produced by the Canadian Army Historical Section, in 1957, was G.W.L. Nicholson’s *The Canadians in Italy*. Nicholson’s superb work was based on a combination of wartime narratives from historical officers Sam Hughes and Eric Harrison, regimental war dairies, operational reports, army-level records, records from other Allied armies, and German sources. Stacey, Nicholson’s superior, emphasized that the writings on the Italian Campaign needed to position the Canadian Army within the context of broader Allied operations, an approach that left Nicholson with little space to illustrate the impact of war on the individual.¹⁵ Even though Nicholson was able to incorporate the odd interaction between Italians and Canadian soldiers, these were always presented as a backdrop to the combat operations that he was illustrating. Moreover, Nicholson merely summarized Ortona’s role after the battle as a place of rest and relaxation for soldiers on leave.¹⁶ Using individual stories solely to assist in understanding combat operations was likely a consequence of Stacey’s personal prejudice against acquiring oral

¹³ C.P Stacey, “Writing the History of the Canadian Army”, *Canadian Army Journal*, Volume 2 - No 1, April 1948, 30-31.

¹⁴ Stacey, *The Canadian Army 1939-1945: An Official Historical Summary*, ix.

¹⁵ G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy 1943-1945: The Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War* (Ottawa: The Department of National Defence, 1957), 331-383.

¹⁶ Nicholson, *The Canadians In Italy*, 331- 383.

testimonies of non-combat experiences by soldiers. As noted in his memoirs, *A Date with History*, “the human memory...is a very frail instrument....one scrap of paper written on the evening of the battle is worth reams of reminiscences written down or spoken into tape records after months or years have passed.” In Stacey’s opinion, the best sources for reconstructing the history of the Canadian Army were the operational logs which focused on combat operations.¹⁷

The publications provided by the Canadian Army Historical Section illustrated only a half dozen interactions between Canadian soldiers and Italians for the entire campaign and provided no accounts of Italian impressions of Canadians before, during, or after the battle. Since the final official publication of the Canadian Army’s participation in the Italian Campaign, numerous complementary works have been published including regimental histories, veterans’ memoirs, and popular histories which provide accounts of Ortona. Some regimental histories, like Strome Galloway’s *A Regiment at War: The Story of the Royal Canadian Regiment, 1939-1945*, Reginald H. Roy’s *The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada 1919-1965*, and G. R. Stevens, *A City Goes to War*, combined information from regimental sources with soldiers’ personal accounts of combat and non-combat activities.¹⁸ Soldiers’ memoirs also offer some insights into the experiences of the common soldier in Ortona, and some included accounts of relations with Italian civilians. Farley Mowat’s *And No Birds Sang* and Stanley Scoslowksi’s *Not All of Us Were Brave* are two examples providing accounts of soldiers interacting with Italians during combat and while in Ortona on leave.¹⁹

¹⁷ Stacey, *A Date with History*, 229-230.

¹⁸ Strome Galloway, *A Regiment at War: The Story of the Royal Canadian Regiment, 1939-1945* (Privately printed, 1979) ; Reginald H. Roy, *The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada 1919-1965* (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1969) ; and G. R. Stevens, *A City Goes to War* (Brampton: Charters Publishing Company Limited, 1965).

¹⁹ Farley Mowat, *And No Birds Sang* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1979); and Stanley Scoslowksi, *Not All of Us Were Brave*, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997).

But the problems associated with such sources were that the interactions with Italians were described in a sporadic, incomplete nature and were told only from the Canadian perspective. In addition, regimental histories and soldiers' memoirs only reflect certain time-frames and are hardly exhaustive studies. This is also the case for popular histories that have been written about Ortona, notably Mark Zuehlke's *Ortona: Canada's Epic World War Two Battle*. Zuehlke provided accounts of some encounters between Italians and Canadians before and during the battle, but offered nothing about the nature of post-battle interactions, nor the impressions Ortonesi formed of their liberators.²⁰

Italian sources have followed a similar pattern. Some have provided a depiction of the experiences of the Ortonesi during the battle, but contain no accounts from Canadian soldiers and no account of activities in Ortona after the battle. A good example is Saverio Di Tullio's *1943 La Via Per Ortona*.²¹ It has provided a variety of reflections from Italians on their experiences during the fighting, but gave no information on the four-month period after the battle, during which the Canadians were present. Other Italian sources like Ascar Buonamano, Giovanni Tavano, and Mauro Vanni's *The Battle of Ortona: I Parchi Della Memoria* provide strong photographic evidence of the characteristics of the interactions between Canadian soldiers and Italians. However, this book offered no insight into how these influenced the Italians and Canadian soldiers' impressions of each other.²²

Even sources that are based on the study of the German units that fought in Ortona provide no information regarding interactions between Germans and Ortonesi. In Ben Christensen's *The 1st Fallschirmjager Division during World War Two*, not one reference

²⁰ Mark Zuehlke, *Ortona: Canada Epic World War II Battle* (Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 2003).

²¹ Saverio Di Tullio, *1943 La Via Per Ortona* (Ottawa: Legas Publishing, 1998).

²² Ascar Buonamano, Giovanni Tavano and Mauro Vanni. *The Battle of Ortona: I Parchi Della Memoria*, (Pescara, Carsa Edizioni, 2003).

was made to the German paratroopers' engagements with the Italian population in Ortona and the surrounding area.²³ The Germans took control of the civilian population and established defensive strong-points within the town and in the areas to the south. Yet Christensen offers no explanation as to how this was accomplished. It is as if the Italians did not exist and that the houses and agricultural hillsides that were being fought over had been inhabited by phantoms prior to the onset of combat operations.

This thesis hopes to complement the existing historiography by partially filling in some of these gaps and providing a unique reflection on Canadian soldiers' experiences in Italy, evidence of the civil role that the Canadian Army played in liberated areas, the types of interactions that occurred between Italians and Canadian soldiers in combat and non-combat settings, and the manner in which these interactions shaped Ortonesi impressions of the Canadians. What has been written on Canada's presence in Ortona is only the tip of the iceberg, as the Canadians spent much more time rebuilding the town than they did fighting there. The interactions between Canadian soldiers and Ortonesi during the Canadians' presence in the town promoted the Canadian soldiers' image among the Ortonesi, developed good relations between both groups, provided social, military, financial, and infrastructural benefits, and established a positive impression of the Canadians as liberators, which continues to be evoked to this day.

This novel approach to a so oft-told tale required an innovative methodology incorporating official and oral Canadian and Italian sources. As will be shown, the memory of the people of Ortona who experienced the battle or its aftermath, is different from the writings provided in the official Canadian Army publications, veterans' memoirs, regimental

²³ Ben Christensen, *The 1st Fallschirmjager Division in World War Two: The Years of Retreat*, Volume II (Atglen, Germany: Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 2007), 368-375. This source provides an entire overview of the Battle of Ortona with not one reference to the Italian civilians in the town and the areas south of the town.

histories, and most popular histories. But, as most Italian sources provided references to Ortonesi experiences only before and during the battle, the author travelled to Ortona in September 2009 to personally interview survivors and to acquire a fuller understanding of Canada's post-battle presence in the town. Many of the Ortonesi mentioned hereafter had been questioned on earlier occasions by both Italians and Canadians. However, these earlier interviews focused solely on outlining the combat operations. The author's experience was that these oral testimonies offered numerous examples of how the Canadians and the Ortonesi interacted with each other in combat and non-combat settings and how these interactions developed mutually positive impressions. The information acquired from all the oral testimonies in this thesis complemented and supported existing documentation that referred to encounters between both groups. When information provided from the testimonies differed from, or could not be supported by, other forms of primary documentation they were not used in this thesis.

The importance of the Canadian soldiers' experiences with the Ortonesi was also a key element to this story. In comparison to other Italian towns like Campobasso and Potenza , Ortona represented one of the few Italian towns that had been badly damaged during the liberation process and as such provided additional challenges to the Canadians after the battle. But what also makes the Canadian experience in Ortona unique was the amount of time the Canadians spent in the town. The Canadians occupied Ortona and the surrounding area from late December 1943 until mid-April 1944. In comparison, the Canadians only spent one month in Sicily and traveled 180 miles during that time. With every regiment in the 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade having rotated through Ortona or the surrounding areas during combat operations or while on leave, all

relevant regimental histories and memoirs have been used in the preparation of this thesis. In addition, between January and March 2010 the author undertook interviews with Canadian veterans of the Italian campaign. The daily logs in regimental war diaries and operational reports provided little information regarding these personal interactions, but routine orders, memoranda from the Town Major of Ortona, billeting plans, and other forms of miscellaneous documentation found within regimental war diaries proved valuable sources in illustrating the diversity of interactions as well as their effects on soldiers and civilians alike. As well, provost and security field section reports, Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories (AMGOT) reports, divisional newspaper articles, and photos extracted from regimental photo albums from Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), and the Canadian War Museum (CWM) proved invaluable, as they provided evidence of the structural rebuilding of the town, social development initiatives, the control and monitoring of civilians and soldiers, and the various initiatives undertaken to make Ortona a more habitable environment for both parties. The utilization of photos was instrumental in demonstrating the types of interactions and initiatives that were undertaken. In certain cases, the photos remain the only proof of certain Canadian-Italian encounters in Ortona. Other photos provide supporting evidence for oral testimonies, memoirs, and other secondary and primary sources that discuss the relationship between Canadian soldiers and the Ortonesi.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One explores the Germans' approach to controlling the Ortonesi, Italian experiences and impressions with and of the Germans, the types of initial interactions that occurred between Canadian soldiers and Italian civilians, their impact on combat operations, and how the Canadians came to perceive their liberators

as uniquely Canadian during this phase of the campaign. Chapter Two addresses the Canadian initiatives undertaken to rebuild Ortona after the battle, including an overview of the state of the town, the emotional and physical state of the Ortonesi and Canadian soldiers, the roles of the Town Major, AMGOT officials, and the civil affairs officer, the approaches used for billeting soldiers, and the initiatives that were undertaken to clear Ortona of mines and booby-traps, and to provide medical support, security and policing, food, and formal employment. Chapter Three investigates the influence of food, billeting, social visits, bartering, and selling on civil-military interactions when Canadian soldiers were on leave in Ortona and how they helped create a positive impression on the Ortonesi. This chapter also illustrates how the presence of Canadian soldiers in Ortona provided entrepreneurial opportunities for the Ortonesi through the development of an informal service-based economy.

By combining oral testimonies, photos, and accounts provided in other documented primary and secondary sources, this thesis identifies the importance of the interactions between the Ortonesi and Canadian soldiers from late December 1943 until April 1944. The resulting good relations facilitated positive impression of the Canadians, and in the end, helped jumpstart Ortona on the road to recovery. Like the Canadians, the Ortonesi recall the epic battle for their town. But they also vividly recall the critical months in the battle's immediate aftermath. This is what this thesis is about.

Chapter 1

First Contact

“As the Germans built their winter lines, special SS Troops were brought from Rome to deal with the simple peasants who stood by helplessly. As their homes were looted or stripped of doors and windows which were sent to Germany, livestock and crops were exchanged for worthless chits which the enemy said would be honored by the allies.”²⁴

The Battle of Ortona was a learning experience in modern urban combat for Canadian soldiers and has been primarily documented as such in primary and scholarly sources. Nevertheless, the social interactions between Canadian soldiers and Ortonesi before and during the battle also provided an important learning experience. The first engagements between Canadians and the Ortonesi in December 1943 improved the quality and quantity of military intelligence, laid the ground work for future military and civil relations, promoted trust between Canadian soldiers and Italians civilians and showcased a human dimension to civil-military interactions during combat operations. But the Italians were as prejudiced as much by the Canadians’ actions as by those of their German nemeses. The German approach to controlling the Italians influenced Ortonesi social relations with foreign occupying forces before December 1943 and affected their impressions of the Canadians through comparison.

This chapter explores the German approach to controlling the Ortonesi, the interactions between German soldiers and Italians during the occupation, the experiences of Ortonesi during combat operations, the types of interactions that occurred during first contact with the Canadians, and how the Canadians were identified as Canadian before the liberation of Ortona. The evidence suggests that the first engagements between Canadian soldiers and Italian civilians had a significant impact on the latter’s initial impressions of the former,

²⁴ Canadian Military Headquarters, Canadian Operations in Italy October – November 1943, Report No 161, 101, Historical Section, RG 24, Volume 6920, LAC.

which at one and the same time benefited the Canadians and also left room for improvements. Moreover, the German occupation of Ortona and the destruction that followed created a pressing need for aid upon liberation, and the Canadians were all the Ortonesi had.

First contact between Canadian and Ortonesi occurred a few weeks before the battle itself as a result of the combat south of the town in early December 1943.²⁵ As the Canadians advanced north of the Moro River, the Germans adopted defensive positions in the southern hamlets and within the town of Ortona. This directly affected the mobility of the Ortonesi and, in doing so, influenced their inaugural encounters with Canadian soldiers. As elements of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade began crossing the Moro River on 5 December, the people of Ortona witnessed the first shells falling in the Constantinople neighborhood along the southern approaches to Ortona.²⁶ The distance between the Moro River and Ortona was four miles if approached directly, but due to the difficult terrain the actual distance by road was seven miles.²⁷ Many Ortonesi were immediately affected by the shelling, but it was the fact that the Canadians were advancing closer to the town that most disrupted their daily routines. The Canadians' advance interrupted the townspeople's movements to hamlets and farms to the south, which forced the Germans to take a more pro-active response to controlling the Italians and preparing defences.

²⁵ Canadian Military Headquarters, Hast and P.E.R. Battle of the Moro River, Bugle (near Ortona) Villa Grande Period 5 Dec 43/31 Jan 44, 2, 145.2H1013 (D1), Directorate of History and Heritage, (DHH).

²⁶ Di Tullio, *La Via Per Ortona*, 68.

²⁷ Daniel Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers: The Canadians in Italy 1943-1945* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1991), 154.

The German approach to dealing with the Ortonesi

With the ending of formal hostilities between Italy and the Allies on 3 September 1943 the Italians were placed in a very odd predicament. The majority of the population, disheartened by two decades of fascist rule, welcomed the signing of the armistice with “flamboyant demonstrations”, as one observer described it.²⁸ Many Italians, including those in the Abruzzo region had a special kinship with nations such as Canada and the United States, both of which were favoured destinations for emigration.²⁹ Combined with the anti-war sentiment found amongst a large portion of the Italian population, the German forces stationed in Italy had to approach any Italian civilian with the same level of caution as did their Allied adversaries.³⁰ For example, after September 1943, many Ortonesi called for armed resistance against both the former fascist regime and the Germans, but nothing came of this.³¹

The Germans had pressing tactical reasons for the control of the Ortonesi and their properties in the countryside to the south, as many local farms were situated in ideal defensive positions above numerous ridges. Lanfranco Berardi remembers German soldiers coming to his family’s home. “They asked my father’s permission to occupy our house, and my father could not refuse.” In the case of the Berardi family, “after the Germans occupied our home, we moved into the barn beside our house and only left when the fighting started.”³² By occupying the Italian houses to the south during the first week of December

²⁸ Account written by Lt. W.C. Stuart, 4 Cdn Recce Regt (4 PLDG) Div HQ near Campobasso, 22 Oct 43, 4th Reconnaissance Regiment, Princess Louise’s Dragoon Guards, 1, Reel T-1267, (RG 24), Volume 14205, LAC.

²⁹ Zuehlke, *Ortona*, 240. A Signore Casanova, who was from Ortona, and whose family was living there during the battle, was working at the Hershey chocolate factory in New Jersey before and during the war and would send money to his family in Ortona.

³⁰ Di Tullio, 12.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009. Berardi noted that the German soldiers who came to his family farmhouse did offer to transport the Berardis’ possessions to another location,

1943, and learning the features of the terrain the Germans had adequate time to create a good defensive line.³³ In other cases, Italian farmhouses occupied by the Germans were used as field hospitals and as rest stations, thus providing immediate medical assistance and a roof to sleep under.³⁴ Such shelters would become crucial for German and, later, Canadian soldiers as the weather worsened in the Abruzzo region in the months of December 1943 and January 1944.³⁵

With the premise of needing to utilize the Italian infrastructure for defensive purposes, and unable trust the majority of the population, the Germans were forced to confront the security concerns that the Italians represented. One of the key problems for the Germans was the mobility of the Ortonesi. A number of Italians who worked in Ortona or who had an apartment or home in the town also had a farm in the countryside or family residing in the hamlets to the south.³⁶ Thus, German interdiction of civilian movements negatively influenced the Ortonesi, as they travelled south or into the town on a daily basis to visit family or go to work. Moreover, as areas to the south were occupied by the Canadians, the routes travelled by some Ortonesi began to cross into Allied lines. The possibility of Italian cooperation with the Allies was highly likely. As noted in a 1st Canadian Corps Intelligence Summary Report, “the Germans had made a custom of evacuating the civilian population

but the family refused the offer. [All Italian interviews for this thesis were transcribed and translated by the author and Angela Arnone, former manager of the Battle of Ortona Museum].

³³ Nicola Paolini interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

³⁴ Emila Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009. Polidoro’s father’s home was used by the Germans originally as a field hospital and then as a defensive strongpoint.

³⁵ Ops Brit, Indian and Dominion Forces, Italy - I, Sec “B” appendices, *Eighth Army Operations Reggion to Ortona*, 4, 952.013 (D45C), DHH.

³⁶ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

from any areas they intended to occupy to avoid the possibility of Italians spying for the English and Americans.”³⁷

Furthermore, a number of Italians who had left Ortona for military service, studies, or employment opportunities during the war’s early years, began returning after the signing of the armistice. For example Tommaso Carceni, a 21-year old Ortonese, returned from Rome where he had been a university student.³⁸ As Italy declared itself a co-belligerent with the Allies in September 1943, the Germans were obliged to monitor these returnees, many of whom were able-bodied men with military experience.³⁹

The German approach to controlling the civilian population was twofold. In Ortona, once the Germans began preparations to mine the town and create tank obstacles on the main city streets, they posted notices ordering all the civilians to leave.⁴⁰ They provided the civilian population with a 12-hour grace period to evacuate, with the opportunity for them to leave in any direction they pleased. Italians who did not evacuate when ordered would be prosecuted. If caught, “whether man or woman, the Italian would be forced to dig weapons pits.” In some cases “when Italian males refused to undertake manual labour for the Germans, their wives, children and other family members were even held as ransom for their cooperation.”⁴¹ In the countryside most Italians were allowed to stay on their farms alongside the Germans or travel north into German-occupied territory. Many families like the Berardi’s, having no idea of the carnage that would visit their farms, opted to stay.⁴²

³⁷ Canadian Military Headquarters, Int Summaries 1Cdn Corps No. 4 (1Jan 44) to No. 47 (30 Apr 44), 3, 224C1.023 (D11), DHH.

³⁸ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

³⁹ Canadian Operations in Italy October – November 1943, Report No 161, 101, LAC.

⁴⁰ Fabio Toncelli (Director), *A Bloody Christmas: Ortona 1943*, Lungotevere Della Navi, Roma, 2009 Documentary, Minute 12:21.

⁴¹ Int Summaries 1Cdn Corps No. 4 (1Jan 44) to No. 47 (30 Apr 44), 3, DHH.

⁴² Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

The Ortonesi Diaspora

The Ortonesi experience with the Germans stationed in their town and the hamlets to the south of Ortona varied. As the Germans began to systematically mine and booby-trap Ortona, and occupy the farmhouses to the south, many Ortonesi were forced to come to terms with their situation and to decide whether to and how to safeguard their property and themselves. Some of the Ortonesi travelled to other towns. For example, Americo Casanova was one of many Ortonesi who travelled to Tollo a village to the west of Ortona for safety. Other members of Casanova's family travelled north to Pescara which was deep in German-occupied territory.⁴³ Moving to larger populated areas exemplified some Italians' hopes that the Germans would abandon major city centres upon the arrival of the Allies and that they would not be caught in a war zone. The effect of these northern movements by the Italians would affect some of their initial encounters with Canadians long after the battle.

Not all travelled north. Some stayed in the vicinity of the town and found shelter in various places. Saverio Albanese's reason for staying had to do with family loyalty. His grandfather was 98 years old and could not be evacuated; so while the rest of his family left before the battle, he stayed to help his grandfather.⁴⁴ Others, like Tommaso Carceni and his family, simply did not want to leave the vicinity of Ortona. As a compromise, the Carceni's originally took refuge under the railway tunnel beside the port, and, a few days later, moved into a storeroom along the railway near the port.⁴⁵ Others who inhabited the farms to the south were in some cases driven into town due to the fighting near their homes. This was the

⁴³ Zuehlke, 240 and 268. Casanova hoped that he could avoid the destruction that came with the Allied advance by moving to a strategically less important destination.

⁴⁴ Fabio, Minute 12:55.

⁴⁵ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

case with the Berardi family, whose members were forced to travel into Ortona and hide in the town cemetery during the battle. The Berardis and the other Ortonesi who hid in the cemetery would witness the ferocity of the battle first hand since artillery shells routinely hit the cemetery throughout the eight days of fighting, uprooting entombed bodies and often killing or wounding those sheltering there.⁴⁶

Other Italians who stayed in Ortona and the hamlets south of the town sheltered in wine cellars and basements.⁴⁷ However, doing so in buildings being defended by the Germans left many civilians buried alive when these buildings were destroyed during the fighting.⁴⁸ Those who hid in the railway tunnel under the town, as Tommaso Carceni had originally done, were provided with a reasonable level of safety. But the Germans were also using this tunnel for shelter and to move around the northern parts of Ortona unmolested during the battle, thus presenting additional dangers to the Ortonesi sheltering there.⁴⁹

Another problem encountered by the Italians who stayed in the town, or found shelter in the houses and apartments in the town's vicinity, related to food and water. The majority could not predict the length of the approaching battle while the ferocity of combat did not allow them any ideal opportunity to scrounge, leaving many on the brink of starvation upon liberation. Tommaso Carceni and the others, who had hid in the storeroom by the Port of Ortona, were trapped within their own shelter, desperately short of food and water.⁵⁰ The dangers near the Port of Ortona became even clearer when the chief of the Carabinieri was

⁴⁶ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

⁴⁷ Giuseppe Graziani interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009. The Graziani family found refuge in a wine cellar in the town of Villa Grande.

⁴⁸ Di Tullio, 91, notes civilians buried under the rubble of collapsed buildings in the hamlets of San Nicola, Villa San Tommaso, and Villa Deo.

⁴⁹ Zuehlke, 284.

⁵⁰ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009. Carceni noted in his interview that the Germans had set up a machine gun inside the cable car that connected the town of Ortona to the port and that it was too dangerous to be outside of the storeroom during the battle for fear of being shot.

killed by German fire on 26 December upon leaving the safety of the storeroom to search for food and water.⁵¹ Some Ortonesi, like the Berardis, were provided with rice and water by the custodian of the town cemetery and his daughter, but even these basic necessities came at a heavy price. On one of her trips to bring food to the Berardis, the custodian's daughter was hit with shrapnel and lost an eye.⁵² A great number of Ortonesi emerged from the battle without having had a meal in days and became very dependent on the Canadians' generosity upon liberation.⁵³ In comparison, those who lived in the countryside south of the town, in most cases, were well supplied with food.⁵⁴ This did not mean that the latter were any safer as many Ortonesi farmers risked their lives amidst the shelling and gunfire surrounding their farms to get fruit from their orchards to feed their families.⁵⁵

Others who saw no point in travelling deeper into German-occupied territory, and who could not find any shelter in buildings or railway tunnels in their area, attempted to cross the lines and reach areas that had already been liberated by the Allies.⁵⁶ This, too, was very dangerous. According to a Canadian intelligence summary during operations undertaken in the town of Ateleta in late November 1943, "many Italian civilians who tried to cross the lines in that area were killed in the crossfire during their attempts."⁵⁷ Some Ortonesi would

⁵¹ Ibid. The Carabinieri is an Italian police force. This chief of the Carabinieri of Ortona was a very popular man among the Ortonesi.

⁵² Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009. The custodian of the cemetery and his daughter would bring the Berardis rice and water.

⁵³ Tommaso Carcenì interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

⁵⁴ Franco D'Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009.

⁵⁵ Zuehlke, 221.

⁵⁶ Di Tullio, 32.

⁵⁷ Canadian Military Headquarters, Italy 1st Canadian Infantry Division Security Intelligence Report No 12, 102, Historical Section, RG 24, Volume 6929, LAC. Ateleta is an Italian town liberated by the Canadians in Abruzzo.

experience the same fate when trying to cross into the Canadian lines north of the Moro River.⁵⁸

What became a common approach was to either dig tunnels in the hillsides or hide in caves, as is seen in the accompanying photo, which shows Nicola Ciambole digging a shelter for his family. Ciambole was able to dig out an area the size of a large room within two days.⁵⁹

Emilia Polidoro's family spent various periods in the caves before, during, and even after the battle. To survive in these conditions, her father snuck out of the caves periodically to search for food and other supplies for his family.⁶⁰ For Franco D'Adamo, who was seven at the time, the shelling reminded him of a theatre show, as the caves provided him and his family with



1: Nicola Ciambole digging a tunnel. 112.3P1 (D110), DHH.

protection from the artillery shells that were pounding the area. Some Italians would stay in these man-made and natural caves even after liberation. In comparison to other shelters, these caves provided the best chances for survival, as the Italians who inhabited them were less likely to be occupying areas that had been deemed as important by either the Germans or Canadians.⁶¹

⁵⁸ D1 Tullio, 96

⁵⁹ DPR Photos of War Correspondents in Italy – 1944, 112 3P1 (D1110), 15 February 1944, DHH

⁶⁰ Emilia Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009

⁶¹ Franco D'Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009

German and Ortonese interactions

Some Ortonesi had had poor experiences with the Germans even before the fierce military operations which took place in Abruzzo. As former allies, Italians and Germans had fought in campaigns together in North Africa, Greece, and Russia, but the relationship had always been an uneasy one. As such, the return of Ortonesi who had served in the military and who had negative memories of interacting with the Germans, sometimes led to poor impressions of all Germans.⁶² And the Germans had done little to endear themselves to Italian civilians.

In most cases, the forced evacuation and the subsequent prosecutions that followed for those who refused to leave caused friction between the Ortonesi and the Germans. The Germans rounded up able-bodied men who had failed to evacuate, and forced them into performing manual labour. This obliged many Italians, like Giuseppe Graziani's father, to hide in his family's basement to avoid being taken. Italians viewed the forced labour as a form of punishment for not obeying German commands. With a defiant attitude and an inability to trust the Germans, occasional confrontations erupted between Ortonesi and their occupiers. On one occasion a German soldier came to take away Giuseppe Graziani's mother for some form of work. In defence of his wife, Giuseppe's father was forced to kill the German soldier to stop him from taking her. Signore Graziani was lucky that shelling hit Ortona during the same moment as the German was killed, as he was able to dispose of the body by making it appear as if the German had been killed by the bombardment.⁶³

⁶² Emilia Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

⁶³ Giuseppe Graziani interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009. If they had found out what his father had done the entire family would have been executed.

The Germans' looting and destruction of personal and public property unsurprisingly also left a negative impression with the Ortonesi. Some Italians, like Angela Casanova, tried to protect their possessions and property from the Germans by refusing to leave Ortona until, in Angela's case, the Germans blew up her house.⁶⁴ There is no record of the Germans providing any form of compensation to the Ortonesi for property damages. The Italians that had refused to leave became witnesses to the destruction of their homes. Some begged and pleaded with the Germans to spare them, but little could be done, as the Germans were using the blown-out houses to create tank obstacles and no other practical substitute existed.⁶⁵ The Germans had additional strategic reasons for blowing up the infrastructure in Ortona. During the campaign to cross the Sangro River, the Germans defending the area had implemented what the Canadians termed as a "Scorched Earth Policy for the buildings and farms on the other side of the river." While the practice was not intended as a specific form of punishment for the Italian civilians, "it was assumed that the Germans, other than showing nothing but abject cruelty to the Italian civilian population, desired to deny the advancing Canadians with any form of winter quarters and force an additional burden of destitute civilians."⁶⁶ Indeed, this practice posed a humanitarian and logistical problem. With many Ortonesi watching the destruction of their homes at the hands of German Sappers, Italian perceptions of the German occupiers was naturally negatively affected. The Ortonesi also witnessed the destruction of parts of their town's infrastructure at the hands of the Germans. For example, German military engineers had destroyed the breakwaters and sank fishing boats around the docks at the port of Ortona before the Canadians' arrival.⁶⁷ The Italians

⁶⁴ Zuehlke, 268.

⁶⁵ Fabio, Minute 32.

⁶⁶ Canadian Operations in Italy October – November 1943, LAC.

⁶⁷ Di Tullio, 58.

who had stayed in Ortona and witnessed the port's destruction knew perfectly well who was responsible for its shattered status.⁶⁸

The Germans further aggravated some Italians by looting. Many Italians had already abandoned the town, leaving their homes ripe for the picking. This did not stop bold German soldiers from confiscating Italian property from the owners' hands. When the Berardi family travelled into Ortona, the older family members tried to hide their jewellery in their underwear. Upon encountering a German patrol in Ortona the Germans told the Berardis not to oppose them and Lanfranco's aunt was forced to give up her jewellery to the soldiers.⁶⁹

The transient state of the Ortonesi also caused problems. The Germans had no idea who to trust due to the fact that Italians were travelling in all directions including across the Allied lines. In one case, a farm hand who worked for the Berardi family had encountered Canadian prisoners of war who were being supervised by German soldiers near the town. This man "traded food to the Canadian prisoners for soap and other supplies, in the hope of bartering them for a profit later." As the Berardis and others travelled back to Ortona, they ran into a separate German patrol that searched them and found these Allied supplies on this farm hand. "He tried to explain where and how he got the supplies, but the Germans would not listen and killed him as a spy."⁷⁰

The Ortonesi experienced some positive dealings with German soldiers, but on a modest scale. Some Germans entertained good relations with the Ortonesi by warning them of the dangers that lingered on the battlefields. Other Germans did not always agree with their own side's actions. For example, during the German occupation of the Berardi farmhouse, the family was warned by the soldiers stationed at their home that some dreaded *Waffen SS*

⁶⁸ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009

⁶⁹ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

⁷⁰ Ibid. The Germans shot this man right in front of his wife and children.

troops were operating in the area and to avoid them if they could.⁷¹ These actions fostered trust between individual groups of Germans and Italians. Some Germans even went so far as to provide assistance to the Ortonesi through the distribution of their own supplies. Nicola Paolini's family originally hid inside a cave that they had made near their farmhouse, but were eventually able to cross over to the Allied lines to relative safety. However, his grandparents elected to stay in the cave and Germans patrolling the area would drop by to check on them and to provide them with food and water.⁷² The Italians also gave food to soldiers on both sides. Franco D'Adamo's family gave the Germans food from their farm, as "for us it was only human to help anyone who was hungry."⁷³ In some cases, however, the Germans took everything they could from the farmers and left them to starve.⁷⁴

Overall, the Ortonesi experiences with the Germans had left many destitute, isolated, and anxious about whether they would live through the fighting.⁷⁵ The Germans, due to their immediate needs in preparing defences against the advancing Canadians, had left the majority of Ortonesi with negative impressions. Although some German initiatives, such as the ordered evacuation of the town, had probably saved many Italian lives, the destruction of their homes, the confiscation of their personal property, and the rounding up of family for forced labour had caused animosity. These would be the final impressions left by the Germans since, before the end of 1943, they were pushed out of Ortona and the areas surrounding the town.

⁷¹ Ibid. The SS were the military wing of the Nazi Party.

⁷² Nicola Paolini interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

⁷³ Franco D'Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009.

⁷⁴ Zuehlke, 222. Once the Germans had lost interest in taking someone away to perform manual labour they usually visited their farm and took everything they could. This was the case for Antonio Di Cesare who had a farm just south of the town.

⁷⁵ Franco D'Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009.

The Canadian soldier and the Italian

The Allied soldier's impression of the Italian civilian before the Armistice can be best defined as wary. Many Canadians who had landed in Sicily had experienced fighting Italian troops. Maurice White, then a Corporal in the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, remembers on one occasion being fired at by Italians during General Bernard Montgomery's visit to the 1st Canadian Infantry Division in Sicily, an act for which the Italians were dealt with soon after.⁷⁶ After the signing of the armistice in September, relations began to warm between Canadian soldiers and Italians. An account written by Lieutenant W.C. Stuart during the liberation of Campobasso on 14 October 1943 notes that "crowds showered us with flowers, waved crudely designed Allied flags or posters calling for "*Viva I Canadesi*" or lavished gifts of fruit and wine on us."⁷⁷

Even with these experiences, the attitude of the Canadian soldier towards the Italian as a potential danger was not dulled, and with reason. Lieutenant-Colonel Jean Allard recalled that upon the Royal 22^e Régiment's arrival at the Ortona-Orsogna crossroads on 14 December "an Italian was discovered manning a machine gun for the Germans. A good Fascist, his defense became his last political act as a patrol, command by Corporal Vallée eliminated him. Unfortunately, Vallée also died in the exchange."⁷⁸ As Canadian veteran Bill Teleske recalls, "Throughout the Italian Campaign we had to watch out for the Fascist

⁷⁶ Maurice White, Corporal, No 7 Platoon, "A" Company, Loyal Edmonton Regiment, interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

⁷⁷ Account written by Lt. W.C. Stuart, 4 Cdn Recce Regt (4 PLDG) Div HQ near Campobasso, 22 Oct 43, 4th Reconnaissance Regiment, Princess Louise Dragoon Guards, 1, Reel T-1267, RG 24, Volume 14205, LAC.

⁷⁸ Serge Bernier and Jean V Allard, *The Memoirs of General Jean V. Allard* (Victoria: University of British Colombia Press, 1988), 63.

die-hards among the civilian population, and in many cases it wasn't very easy to distinguish between the two."⁷⁹ It took a while for relations to warm up.

Interacting with Italians was not the main task for the Canadians. The 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade's mission was to take Ortona. According to a 1944 report, the town had been "spared heavy bombing and concentrated artillery fire prior to the battle because the Royal Navy had planned on using its deep sea port facilities and long breakwater. The Canadians planned on using the town as a winter rest station."⁸⁰ Although the Canadian soldiers were focused on this objective, during their advance across the Moro River they began meeting Ortonesi who had successfully crossed the lines as well as Italians who had hidden in the hillsides.⁸¹

Canadian humanitarian aid, perspectives on the state of the Ortonesi, and interactions during combat.

The Canadian approach to dealing with the Italian civilian population was based on the necessity to evacuate the Italians to the rear as fast as possible while also providing medical or humanitarian assistance. One Canadian intelligence report noted that "in Abruzzo, civilian casualties and the seriously ill were evacuated to the emergency civilian hospital at Campobasso." The 1st Canadian Infantry Division had been provided with a Refugee Control Officer by the Eighth Army to assist Military Government officials in the control of refugees. The Refugee Control Officers' mandate was "to assist in the evacuation of Italian

⁷⁹ Bill Teleske, Corporal, No 16th Platoon, "D" Company, Loyal Edmonton Regiment, interview with author, 14 March 2010.

⁸⁰ Operations of 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armed Brigade in Italy 25 Nov 1943 – 4 Jan 1944, Report No. 165, 84, RG-24, Volume 6920, LAC.

⁸¹ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

refugees from the forward area and manage the movement of civilian oxen and carts off roads, so as not to impede allied traffic to the front.”⁸²

One Canadian Military Headquarters report noted that “due to much allied propaganda by the media of the BBC, most of the refugees flocking south are under the impression that the allies are going to welcome them, feed them, clothe them, rehabilitate them, build new homes for them and set them up completely five minutes after they have crossed the lines. They are unreasonable and lacking any self-control.”⁸³ The Canadian soldiers who met these refugees held different impressions. Many soldiers felt sympathy for the Italian civilians’ situation. Corporal Maurice White recalled that “many were starving.”⁸⁴ Lieutenant Farley Mowat noted that the Italian refugees were “something I had never seen before, as I witnessed them in little clots and clusters trudging along the roadsides. They were clad in unidentifiable scraps of black, rain-soaked clothing and many walked barefoot in coagulating mud that was barely above the freezing point.”⁸⁵

As a number of Ortonesi had been defiant toward German orders, Mowat noticed that the majority of the refugees encountered were women and children, and that “there were no men of young or middle years among them.”⁸⁶ When the Italians who crossed the lines relayed their experiences with the Germans to the Canadians, the latter sensed a higher level of frustration and anger towards their adversaries. Indeed, the treatment of Italians at the hands of the Germans brought about a bond between Italian refugees and Canadian soldiers.

⁸² Historical Section File Italy First Canadian Infantry Division Security Intelligence Report #12, November 26, 1943, 1, 260C2.099 (D22), DHH.

⁸³ Canadian Operations in Italy October – November 1943, Report No 161, 101, Historical Section, LAC.

⁸⁴ Maurice White interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

⁸⁵ Mowat, *And No Birds Sang*, 207.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Mowat recalled that “our boys are so fucking well brassed off about it, they aren’t taking any prisoners. Not those First Parachute bastards anyhow!”⁸⁷

The combat operations undertaken to the south of Ortona by the men in both the Canadian infantry and tanks were exceedingly difficult. Originally, Eighth Army military intelligence had assumed that the Canadians would advance north of Ortona from the southwest, thus encircling the town and forcing the Germans to abandon their occupation. Even the commander of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division, Major-General Chris Vokes, did not anticipate the fierce engagements to the south of Ortona at Casa Berardi or within Ortona itself.⁸⁸ Although the German resistance in the town had surprised the Canadians, the same could not be said for the Canadian advance along the coastal road to Ortona.

Originally the German 90th Panzer Grenadier Division and the 65th Infantry Division had wanted to abandon Ortona, but by 13 December Field Marshal Albert Kesselring was determined to solidify his winter line.⁸⁹ This decision was forced upon the Germans due to the Canadians’ decision to not bypass the town but attack it directly. Kesselring replaced both the 65th and 90th with elements of the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Regiments of the 1st Parachute Division, with the mission of defending the areas south of the town and Ortona itself.⁹⁰ Knowing that the Canadians would advance upon Ortona, the Germans evacuated the civilians to the best of their abilities, meticulously blew out entire rows of houses to form tank barriers, and set up mines along the roads and booby-traps in houses.⁹¹ This would be a fight that would force the Canadians to bleed for every hill, ravine, and farmhouse to the

⁸⁷ Ibid, 207.

⁸⁸ Zuehlke, 223.

⁸⁹ Christensen, 368.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 374.

⁹¹ Carl Bayerlien, "Parachute Engineers in Combat, Ortona 1943: A German Perspective" *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Edited by Dean Oliver (autumn, 1999), 49.

south and, upon arrival in Ortona, compel the Canadians to kick down every door in every room of every house.⁹²

Such a level of combat did not facilitate many relaxed or long-lasting meetings between Canadian soldiers and the Ortonesi during the fighting. After crossing the Moro River on 6 December, the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment noted in a report to Canadian Military Headquarters that its men had, “encountered heavy enemy machinegun fire, lacked wireless communications, were suffering heavy casualties and were low on ammo.”⁹³ Soldiers in other regiments of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division also ran into difficulties. In the two weeks that followed the Moro crossing, the Canadians were forced to advance on a number of well-defended positions. On 10 December the Loyal Edmonton Regiment entered the hamlet of San Leonardo to the south of Ortona, but took control of the area only after beating off a well-supported counterattack by the 200th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. After taking San Leonardo it required the combined efforts of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, and a squadron of tanks of the Calgary Regiment to reach the gulley below Casa Berardi on 13 December. The responsibility of taking Casa Berardi fell to the Royal 22e Régiment supported by the tanks of “C” Squadron of the Ontario Regiment. The fighting in the area continued until 15 December when the German 3rd Parachute Regiment finally withdrew. It then took another three days to take control of the Cider Crossroads to the south of Ortona.⁹⁴ In all, the Canadians spent more than two weeks rotating through their regiments to advance the four miles to Ortona,

⁹² Christensen, 369.

⁹³ Hast and P.E.R. Battle of the Moro River, Bulge (near Ortona) Villa Grande Period 5 Dec 43/31 Jan 44, 1-2, 145.2H1013(D1), DHH.

⁹⁴ Nicholson, 305-320. As others have much discussed the campaign across the Moro River and the battle of Ortona there will be no overview here of the operations that occurred. For more information, please consult G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy 1943-1945*, 304-333 or Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers*, 154-218.

suffering heavy casualties in the process. The Canadians would not reach the southern outskirts of the town until 20 December.

Upon the Loyal Edmonton Regiment's second day of fighting in Ortona, on 21 December, the unit encountered "stone barriers with mines under the rubble of the buildings."⁹⁵ The Germans had created "selected killing grounds" for the advancing Canadians along the main roads of the town by forcing them into the town's open squares and public spaces.⁹⁶ Casualties mounted for both the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada as they continued to advance. The German defensive tactics forced the Canadians to implement "street and house to house fighting."⁹⁷ To avoid the German killing grounds the Canadians began blowing holes in the houses of buildings along the main roads of the town to advance. This tactic became known as "mouse-holing". As the Canadians moved from house to house the defending German paratroopers continuously forced a "bitter struggle" for each room and each floor of every house.⁹⁸ The ferocity of the battle would only end when the Germans pulled out during the night of 27 December. CBC war correspondent Matthew Halton described the battle as "the courtyard of hell."⁹⁹

Even so, this 'courtyard' witnessed some of the first encounters between Ortonesi and Canadians within Ortona itself. The interactions resulted from the house-to-house fighting with most occurring during the Canadians' clearing of a house, which led them to the basements and wine cellars in which Italians were hiding. On one occasion a British war

⁹⁵ Loyal Edmonton Regiment, Active Service Force War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 21 December 1943, LAC.

⁹⁶ Operations of 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armed Brigade in Italy 25 Nov 1943 – 4 Jan 1944, 86, Report No. 165, LAC.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Nicholson, 325-328

⁹⁹ Matthew Halton, *Attacking Ortona*, CBC News, 23 December 1943, http://archives.cbc.ca/war_conflict/second_world_war/clips/9856/.

correspondent in Ortona came across a group of Canadians and Ortonese in a basement of a house in the town and reflected on what he saw.

*“There were old women and there were children innumerable. In the half-darkened room the pasta for the midday meal was simmering over the fire in the corner. Haggard, prematurely aged women kept emerging shyly one after another from some inner chamber where an old man, the grandfather of the numerous children was dying... Another old man was uttering maledictions against Mussolini. Then his wife surprisingly produced a jeroboam of Marsala and half a dozen glasses and moved around among the soldiers, filling and re-filling their glasses. The children clambered around the Canadian soldiers and clutched at them convulsively every time one of our anti-tank guns, located only half a dozen paces from the door of the house, fired down the street in the direction of one of the remaining German machine-gun posts. Soon each one of us had a squirming, terrified child in his arms. And the old lady went on distributing Marsala”.*¹⁰⁰

The Ortonesi and the Canadian soldiers’ meetings divulge a great deal more than just a reference to anti-fascism and the clamouring of children. Although the battle continued to inflict casualties on the Canadians, the soldiers who encountered Ortonesi during the fighting developed a sympathetic understanding of the hardships the Italians were experiencing. As Corporal Maurice White of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment recalled, “I entered one of the first buildings on the outskirts of Ortona and ran into a family who were very scared.”¹⁰¹ These experiences combined with encounters with Italian refugees to the south of the town would later develop into a strong desire by the Canadians to help the people of Ortona after the Germans had been driven out.

There were positive and negative aspects to the encounters with a subsequent impact on the Ortonesi’s views of the soldiers as Canadians. Being in a combat zone many of the first engagements with Italians were initiated while under fire. When the Royal 22e Régiment

¹⁰⁰ Nicholson, 331.

¹⁰¹ Maurice White interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

advanced on Casa Berardi on the night of 13 December, they encountered strong German resistance from an excellent defensive strongpoint overlooking the gully.¹⁰² Lanfranco Berardi's first brush with Canadians was being shot at by soldiers of the Royal 22e Régiment during a night engagement. "My family had taken shelter in the barn beside our house. The Canadians, who were already firing on the house that was being defended saw me moving in the barn and began to fire". Berardi was lucky enough to have had one of his family's farm hands grab him and pull him to the ground. The Berardi's didn't know that the soldiers were Canadian, as the family only recognized German and Italian helmets. The Berardis would not know the identity of the Allied soldiers until after the battle.¹⁰³

Young Franco D'Adamo's first run-in with Canadians came when a reconnaissance unit visited his family's house. His mother had just died and his father was wearing a black shirt for mourning. When the Canadians came upon Franco's father, they believed he was a fascist for wearing a black shirt and the D'Adamos believed they wanted to execute him. Luckily for the D'Adamos, Franco's grandmother was able to persuade the Canadians to go upstairs and observe the shrine for D'Adamo's deceased mother. Once the Canadians understood why her was wearing black they vacated the area. The Canadian soldiers' actions displayed an anxiety that had existed between themselves and Italians before coming upon the D'Adamo household. Once again, the D'Adamo families not knowing the soldiers were Canadians, believed them to be British.¹⁰⁴ For both the Berardis and the D'Adamos, there was no opportune moment to clarify the nationality of the Canadians during their first

¹⁰² Operations of 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armed Brigade in Italy 25 Nov 1943 – 4 Jan 1944, 66-67, Report No. 165, LAC.

¹⁰³ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Franco D'Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009.

encounters. This provided the Canadians with a chance to build a better relationship with both families after the battle.

Canadian control of civilians

As the Canadians began advancing through the countryside south of Ortona, they evacuated the majority of the Italians to the rear of the lines as they had done with the Italians who had crossed the lines. This caused minor frictions with Ortonesi, for many had not hidden in their homes during the fighting to be evacuated afterwards. Farley Mowat noted one occasion in which his commanding officer established his forward headquarters where fifteen Italians, men, women, and young children, were living. As his regiment needed the building, the Italians were moved out and sent towards the rear, all except one old man who refused to leave.¹⁰⁵ Such occasions were not uncommon as soldiers of the Royal Canadian Regiment experienced a similar situation when attempting to evacuate Italians from a house and one of the men refused to do so. In this case, the Italian emphasized his ownership of the house and that generations of his family had been born inside its walls.¹⁰⁶

The Canadian soldiers found it hard to rationalize the mentality of the Italians in these cases. A Canadian Military Headquarters report for operations in Italy from October to November 1943 concluded that “the average inhabitant of an Italian village reckons his life accomplishments in terms of ownership, which rarely goes beyond a few sticks of furniture, a donkey or odd heirloom, which is a tangible link to the past.”¹⁰⁷ But it was not irrationality that caused some Italians to refuse to vacate their homes. Trust between Canadian soldiers

¹⁰⁵ Mowat, *The Regiment*, 158.

¹⁰⁶ Galloway, *A Regiment at War*, 246.

¹⁰⁷ Canadian Operations in Italy October – November 1943, 101, Report No 161, Historical Section, LAC

and the Ortonesi had not been solidified during the combat operations to the south of the town. As such, if the Italians had not lost their possessions to the Germans during their occupation, or to the subsequent destruction during combat operations they were not willing to abandon them for the Canadians to have at the time of their so-called liberation.

Some Italians believed that the Canadians were motivated by reasons other than evacuating them to safer areas. Franco D'Adamo's family experienced the evacuation from their home by the Canadians not long after their first encounter and spent the next two months living in caves. D'Adamo believed that the soldiers desired the ham, olive oil, and cheese inside his home. The soldiers' best way to get these supplies without any problems was by sending the Italians away. Years later D'Adamo simply reasoned that "such things happen in war."¹⁰⁸ In most cases, the Canadians were just following the protocol regarding the evacuation of civilians. It remains true, however, that some soldiers benefited from the absence of Italian inhabitants. For example, a soldier of the Royal Canadian Regiment was able to get bread and wine from a deserted house on 25 December.¹⁰⁹ One of the motives for taking supplies from the Italians was that in most cases the Italians' supplies were far better to eat than the food provided by army cooks.¹¹⁰

This was not be the only time Canadians would confiscate items. By the time the battle of Ortona ended, many soldiers had looted the buildings that had been left unscathed. Some officers attempted to reason with their men regarding the impact of looting civilian property, but the Canadian soldier had difficulty distinguishing between the offence of looting and the

¹⁰⁸ Franco D'Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Strome Galloway, *Some Died at Ortona: The Royal Canadian Regiment in Action in Italy, 1943 "A Diary"* (London: The Royal Canadian Regiment, 1983), 208.

¹¹⁰ Dancocks, 69.

joy of liberating.¹¹¹ Italian Campaign historian Daniel Dancocks provides Major-General Chris Vokes's reflections on both liberating and looting. In Vokes's opinion "Liberating is putting something, not too valuable, to one's immediate use. If one liberated a goose for the purpose of eating it, all right. If one liberated a carpet for one's caravan, all right. Liberating can become stealing. Stealing is the taking of very valuable things for personal gain. Art treasures sent home, for example, is looting."¹¹² Thus, in the eyes of some Canadian officers, the "liberating" of items was considered fair game for soldiers at war. In Ortona after the liberation Canadian soldiers found and confiscated silverware hidden in a house.¹¹³ On another occasion the Berardis ran into a Canadian soldier at their home. This soldier had in his possession a stolen picture frame with a picture of a woman. The Canadian stated it was his girlfriend, but it actually was a picture of the frame's owner who happened to be a relative of Signora Berardi. Signore Berardi was able to prove that the picture had been stolen as there was an Italian stamp of origin on the back that said Ortona on it. Lanfranco now looks back and laughs at the fact that the soldier had looted from one Berardi house only to walk into another and get caught.¹¹⁴ In fact, all food, liquor, clothes and all German possessions were viewed as fair game to Canadian soldiers during the Italian Campaign.¹¹⁵ Not all Canadian soldiers took part in looting. Some of the men could identify the impact looting on the relations with the Italians and preferred to promote their national identity and character by not taking what was not theirs. Other Canadian soldiers reasoned that the Germans and Italians had started the war and deserved whatever came to them.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Zuehlke, 350-351.

¹¹² Dancocks, 70.

¹¹³ Zuehlke, 350.

¹¹⁴ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

¹¹⁵ Zuehlke, 350.

¹¹⁶ Craig B. Cameron, *Born Lucky: RSM Harry Fox, MBE One D-Day Dodger's Story* (St. Catharines, Ont: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2005), 71 and 80.

The basis for the evacuation of Italians from their houses was due to the dangers that lingered, as shelling was still prevalent in most forward areas. In other cases, the Canadian soldiers utilized the remaining infrastructure for shelter against the cold weather. Mowat later reflected on the good rest that he received while sleeping in an Italian house and that the stone walls provided a better level of protection than did a slit trench.¹¹⁷

This is not to say that there were no positive interactions during the occupation of Italian homes and farms. In some cases, as recalled by Private Rudy Deutsch of the 5th Field Ambulance, “we would sleep in the homes with the Italians still occupying them.” In this manner nothing was stolen and good relations were established. Many soldiers had been provided with an Italian phrase book and Private Deutsch was able to use some basic Italian during his dealings with civilians.¹¹⁸ This was no doubt well perceived by the Ortonesi.

Saving Italian lives

Some Ortonesi fared better regarding their first encounters with Canadian soldiers. In some cases, Canadian soldiers had saved Italian lives during the chaos of combat. Tommaso Cespa, who was ten years old during the battle, remembers that “Canadian soldiers helped my father after he received shrapnel wounds near Fantai Grande.” He was able to identify the soldiers helping his father as Canadians because another family that was taking refuge in the same place as his had lived in the United States and were able to identify the troops as Canadians.¹¹⁹ Rudy Deutsch stated that “we helped everyone, Germans, Canadians, and

¹¹⁷ Farley Mowat, *My Fathers Son: Memories of War and Peace* (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1992), 24.

¹¹⁸ Rudy Deutsch, Private, 5th Field Ambulance attached to 2nd Infantry Brigade, interview with the author 25 January 2010.

¹¹⁹ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

Italians that were wounded.”¹²⁰ During the battle Canadian soldiers often provided medical assistance to Ortonesi. On one occasion, soldiers of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment helped a pregnant woman who had been buried alive by an explosion. The woman promised the soldiers that the baby’s middle name would be *Canadese*.¹²¹ During the battle, the 5th Field Ambulance took control of the orphanage in Ortona and established a field hospital after asking the nuns’ permission to do so. Many Italians became dependent on the Canadians for medical assistance as the battle raged on. Deutsch remembers an Italian who had both of his legs blown off near the Port of Ortona with his two sons crying beside him. He gave this man morphine and carried him to the hospital for treatment while also taking care of his sons who were in a traumatized state. Sadly the man died during surgery.¹²² The initiatives undertaken by Canadian medics and soldiers to help injured Ortonesi greatly benefited the image of the Canadians among the local population.

The Canadians were careful to avoid civilian casualties. On one occasion on 25 December, Maria Moro was able to communicate to a Canadian officer that there were civilians inside the town hospital which was about to be attacked by a tank of the Three Rivers Regiment. The officer ran to the tank and prevented the hospital from being destroyed. Unfortunately, one round from the tank had been fired before the officer could intervene.¹²³ Such actions by the Canadians are recalled not in the regimental war diary of the Three Rivers Regiment, but in the collective memories of the Ortonesi who might have been killed if it was not for their liberators’ approach to avoiding civilian losses during combat.

¹²⁰ Rudy Deutsch interview with the author, 25 January 2010.

¹²¹ Zuehlke, 349. *Canadese* is Italian for Canadian.

¹²² Rudy Deutsch interview with author, 25 January 2010. The hospital that was established in the town orphanage of Ortona is the current Battle of Ortona Museum.

¹²³ Toncelli, Minute 42.

The importance of being Canadian

The Italians had reason to fear some Allied troops. Some Ortonesi, like Emila Polidoro's father, had been told by the Germans that the Moroccans were advancing in their direction. Stories were circulating in occupied Italy about abuses incurred by Italians at the hands of North African troops and, accordingly many feared being liberated.¹²⁴ But the Canadians did not have a negative reputation amongst the Italians whom they liberated. In towns like Campobasso, many friendships had been made between the Italians and their Canadian liberators. Even months after liberation, the Canadians could not walk down Campobasso's streets without hearing people cheer and call them *Boun Canadese* "Good Canadian."¹²⁵ Once the Ortonesi found out that their liberators were Canadians their anxiety and fear evaporated.¹²⁶

National identity played a very important role during liberation. The Canadian soldiers were very proud of being Canadian. Corporal Maurice White stated that "we made a point of communicating to the Italians who they were being liberated by, as we felt we had a pretty good reputation."¹²⁷ The Canadian soldiers, other than learning the term, *Tedesco molto cattivo*, "Germans are very bad" from their Italian phrasebook, also learned the word *Canadesi*, "Canadian", so that the Italians could understand who they were in their own language.¹²⁸ Moreover the 1st Division's famous red patch emblem on their uniform sleeve and the Canadians' cap badges having the word Canada on them assisted the Italians in

¹²⁴ Emila Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

¹²⁵ Charles Fraser Comfort, *Artist at War* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1995), 116.

¹²⁶ Emila Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

¹²⁷ Maurice White interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

¹²⁸ Giuseppe Graziani interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009. Graziani recalled that the first time he encountered Canadians they told him they were Canadian in Italian.

identifying them.¹²⁹ Indeed, many Italians, such as Nicola Paolini, first discovered that the Allied soldiers liberating them were Canadians when “I noticed that the soldiers’ shoulder flashes said ‘Canada’ on them.”¹³⁰ Of course it was not always so easy to identify the Canadian soldiers as Canadians. The British-style uniforms and the fact that some soldiers were French-Canadian and spoke French confused some Italians.¹³¹

Intelligence and aid by the Ortonesi

Although the Ortonesi had experienced both positive and negative encounters with Canadian soldiers during their first contacts, the Canadians were generally able to gain the Italian’s trust and help. This became a very important aspect of the developing relations between both groups as many Ortonesi had a superior knowledge of the topography around Ortona and some even held extensive knowledge of Germans defences. This made the Ortonesi a very important asset to Canadian soldiers, who in some cases had outdated and incorrect maps of the area.¹³² Some Italians helped Canadian soldiers was by providing intelligence. For example, the Germans had laid mines along roads south of Ortona and within the town itself. Soldiers of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada were “warned by civilians that the areas in and around the town had been heavily mined.”¹³³ This encounter provided the Canadian soldiers with one example of the kinds of assistance the Italians could provide. In addition, some Ortonesi tried to aid Canadian soldiers caught behind enemy lines. On one occasion, Emilia Polidoro’s father encountered a soldier hiding from German patrols. Signore Polidoro assisted the Canadian by providing him with food and protection

¹²⁹ Rudy Deutsch interview with the author, 25 January 2010.

¹³⁰ Nicola Paolini interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

¹³¹ Zuehlke, 357.

¹³² Emilia Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

¹³³ The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada War Diaries 1943/06-1944, 18 December 1943, LAC.

until he was able to get back to his unit.¹³⁴ Assistance provided to Canadian soldiers captured by the Germans or lost in enemy territory was not an uncommon occurrence in the Abruzzo region. In all, there were 20,484 cases in Abruzzo alone in which Italian civilians helped Allied soldiers to escape.¹³⁵ Many Allied soldiers felt a strong sense of gratitude towards the Italians who helped them escape.¹³⁶

In other cases, the Ortonesi shared their shelters with the Canadian soldiers in the field. Nicola Paolini's family shared the cave they inhabited with two soldiers from the West Nova Scotia Regiment. At one point in the night, a German patrol came by and asked the family if there were any Allied soldiers in the cave, and the family said no. But when one of the Germans said something in English, one of the Canadians responded and the soldiers were taken prisoner. The Germans were angered with the Italians' betrayal wanted to arrest and prosecute the Paolini family. But the Canadian captives were able to convince the Germans not to harm Nicola's family for aiding them.¹³⁷

Not all assistance provided by the Ortonesi to Canadian soldiers would be as complicated. On 26 December some soldiers of the Royal Canadian Regiment were pinned down from machine gun fire and blocked from getting water from a well. Noticing that the Germans left Ortonesi unmolested when they went for water, the Canadians prevailed on the Italians to get the water for them.¹³⁸ In this case, the Ortonesi were able to provide the Canadian soldiers with a level of support that the Canadians would have otherwise had to risk their lives to obtain.

¹³⁴ Emila Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

¹³⁵ Roger Neil Lewis Absalom, *A Strange Alliance: Aspects of Escape and Survival in Italy 1943-1945* (Firenze: Leo Olschki Editore, 1991), 236.

¹³⁶ Mowat, *The Regiment*, 123.

¹³⁷ Nicola Paolini interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009; Di Tullio, 29.

¹³⁸ Galloway, *Some Died at Ortona*, 209.

Overall, the first encounters before and during the battle of Ortona provided the Canadian soldier and Ortonese with a variety of positive and negative experiences. The majority of the negative experiences for both Ortonesi and Canadians revolved around combat or were due to obligations regarding the control of the civilian population. In most cases, Canadian soldiers were identified in a positive manner during first contact and performed to the best of their abilities in aiding the Ortonesi with supplies and medical treatment, while also achieving tactical objectives. During first contact both parties generally were able to establish a strong sense of trust.

With the liberation of Ortona on 28 December 1943, the question turned to how the Canadians would build on, expand, and develop a stronger relationship with the Italians of Ortona. Many Ortonesi returned to find their homes destroyed and family members missing.¹³⁹ As combatants, the Canadians had shared in the responsibility for the town's destruction. The reputation of the Canadian soldier for the Ortonesi would hinge on the initiatives undertaken to provide assistance and how these plans were put into effect.

¹³⁹ Zuehlke, 357.

Chapter 2

The Battle to Rebuild

“At 1200 hours on December 28th, 1943 A Company of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada reported that they had encountered no enemy and had reached and found clear the North West Sector of Ortona.”¹⁴⁰

After a week of intense fighting, the Germans abandoned Ortona and took up defensive positions along the Ricco and Arielli rivers.¹⁴¹ By the early weeks of January 1944, the Adriatic front had settled, with both sides peering over their barbed-wire entanglements and minefields.¹⁴² The static position of the Canadians from the end of December 1943 until early April 1944 provided the catalyst to initiate the rebuilding of the civilian infrastructure and saw a growing and increasingly important Canadian presence in the area.

As the Canadians began to settle, Eighth Army headquarters directed that a new vocation for the town be established. The new mission for Ortona, as described by Major-General Chris Vokes, was to rebuild the town into leave centre.¹⁴³ The process to rebuild the town is absent in all published accounts of the battle as historians have followed Nicholson’s example of using the battle as the climax to the operations in the area. The gap left by scholars has defined the Canadians as liberators, but without an understanding of post-liberation activities and how these impacted the Ortonesi. The Canadians’ role in the town’s destruction is evident given their approach used to defeat the Germans. The Canadian occupation of Ortona after liberation became a unique opportunity to provide aid and infrastructural development through the provision of security and funding. This chapter

¹⁴⁰ Seaforth Highlanders of Canada War Diaries 1943/06-1944, 28 December 1943, LAC.

¹⁴¹ Dancocks, 214.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ John P. Maclean and Maj- Gen Chris Vokes, *VOKES: My Story* (Ottawa: pGallery Publishing, 1985), 144-145.

focuses on outlining the various initiatives to rebuild Ortona, as these measures influenced the physical and psychological state of the Ortonesi and Canadian soldiers after liberation. Traditional military studies on Ortona has ignored the important role that the town played in improving soldiers' morale through simple forms of pleasure such as, warm and comfortable billets. Most Ortonesi had nothing upon liberation and consequently became very dependent on the Canadians for assistance. The status of the Ortonesi allowed the Canadians to develop and improve their standing with the civilian population by making Ortona a safer place in which to live, by providing Italians with medical assistance, food, security, an income and an opportunity to actively participate in the rebuilding of the town. This process greatly benefited the townspeople and magnified the positive impressions of the Canadians as liberators.

The state of Ortona, the Ortonesi, and the Canadian soldier

The Ortonesi who had stayed remembered “a great silence” on 28 December. During that day, many, including Tommaso Carceni, left their shelters to see what sustenance they could locate. “I was starving so I climbed up the hill from the port to look around and find food.”¹⁴⁴ However, all that the surviving inhabitants would discover was rubble and dead bodies in place of a once-vibrant town. The process of establishing Ortona as a leave centre was a battle in its own right for the town had been almost completely destroyed. Canadian war artist Charles Comfort was so taken aback by the destruction that he was unable to sketch the town upon liberation, and would only return days later to paint the remnants of *La*

¹⁴⁴ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

basilica di San Tommaso.¹⁴⁵ Another soldier reflected that “One felt a choking claustrophobia in the place. Everywhere was misery, death and destruction.”¹⁴⁶ Many Ortonesi hid in the countryside during the battle and did not return to their homes until the Canadians had secured the area. The survivors were on the brink of starvation, as only a few had requisitioned enough supplies to last the eight days of fighting.¹⁴⁷ Tommaso Carceni had travelled into the town on the 28th to see what was left. “I ran into a soldier by the name of Ernest. He gave me some porridge to eat. At first I didn’t know what it was, but I ate all of it.”¹⁴⁸ The first interactions Italians had with Canadians after the battle were mainly centered on food distribution. This was the case for the Berardi family whose members began travelling back to their farm from the cemetery. Upon reaching the Cider Crossroads, they came into direct contact with Canadians. Lanfranco Berardi recalled that “I had no shoes and the Canadians tried to give me some chocolate, but I was scared of them at first.”¹⁴⁹ Corporal Maurice White recalled “that Italians would ask for chocolate or biscuits from us, because the Germans took all of their food.” “I gave the kids some chocolates.”¹⁵⁰ Other initial activities involved providing physical assistance to the Ortonesi as they entered the blocked and jumbled streets and squares of the crumbling town. The photo on the follow page shows two Canadian soldiers helping elderly women navigate amongst the rubble in the Piazza Plebiscito.¹⁵¹ With many Ortonesi in a state of dismay, these initial forms of assistance provided many of the Italians, who had not interacted with Canadians before the fighting, with a positive first impression of their liberators.

¹⁴⁵ Dancocks, 186.

¹⁴⁶ Cameron, 71 and 80.

¹⁴⁷ Di Tullio, 96.

¹⁴⁸ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

¹⁴⁹ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

¹⁵⁰ Maurice White interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

¹⁵¹ Buonamano, Tavano, and Vanni, 111.



2 Two unidentified Canadian soldiers providing assistance to elderly Ortonesi. *The Battle of Ortona "I Parchi Della Memoria"*.

The physical state of the civilians was not the only concern of the Canadians. Their emotional state was also at a breaking point. When Tommaso Carceni walked amongst the ruins, he came into contact with the dead bodies of many Ortonesi, some of whom he knew. With a population of just over ten thousand people, many locals had lost family members and friends during the fighting. The physical damage to their homes and properties exacted a toll as well. Carceni recalled that “When I saw my house and *La Basilica San Tommaso* destroyed, I burst into tears.”¹⁵² The *Basilica San Tommaso* was of great importance to both the people of Ortona and Catholics all over the world, as it was the resting place of St. Thomas. During the battle, very

¹⁵² Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009

few knew the fate that had befallen their church.¹⁵³ There are no textual sources on the impact that the destruction of the of *La Basilica San Tommaso* had on the population, but the review of photographic evidence showing Canadian Public Relations Officers and the parish priest, Don Pietro Di Filvio visiting the damaged basilica provides a clear indication that the Canadians recognized its importance to the people.¹⁵⁴ Indeed some Ortonesi partially blame the destruction of *La Basilica San Tommaso* on the Canadians, as participants in the battle. The controversy amongst Italians as to who was responsible for its destruction is still debated. Both Canadian and German veterans have denied being participants in the church's destruction during the fighting.¹⁵⁵ What may have deflected the majority of the Ortonesi's criticisms of the Canadians was the manner in which the latter approached religious



3: Canadian Public Relations Officers and the parish priest Don Pietro Di Filvio visiting the damaged *Basilica San Tommaso*. 112.3P1 (D1109), DHH.

representatives of the basilica just after the battle, as seen in the photo. A genuine interest in the Italians' spiritual and cultural possessions promoted the view of Canadian respect and concern for the well being of the Ortonesi.

¹⁵³ Kim Beattie, *Dileas: The 48th Highlanders of Canada 1929-1956* (Toronto: Published by the 48th Highlanders of Canada, 1957), 482.

¹⁵⁴ DPR Photos of 1 Cdn Public Relations Unit in Italy – 1943/1944, 112.3P1 (D1109), 11 March 1944, DHH.

¹⁵⁵ Toncelli, Minute 22.

Italian privations aside, the condition of Canadian soldiers' were not much better. Upon taking command of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada on 30 December, Lieutenant-Colonel Creighton concluded that his men were at the point of exhaustion and that there was a strain on all ranks.¹⁵⁶ Before the crossing of the Moro River on 5 December neuropsychiatric cases had been deemed "relatively light" for regiments of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division. But from 7–28 December alone, five hundred and eighty-seven battle exhaustion cases were reported.¹⁵⁷ By 4 January 1944 another fifty-four exhaustion cases were being dealt with by the 4th Canadian Field Ambulance.¹⁵⁸ Compounded with the Canadians who were physically wounded, dead, or taken prisoner during the same period, many of the surviving soldiers began to experience very low morale.¹⁵⁹ In Major-General Chris Vokes's opinion, the fighting from the Moro River to Ortona had caused the 1st Canadian Infantry Division to lose its fighting edge.¹⁶⁰ The casualties inflicted on infantry and tank units were so high that in some cases reinforcements from one regiment had to be diverted to another. This was the case for the Loyal Edmonton Regiment's "C" Company which received reinforcements from the Cape Breton Highlanders of Canada.¹⁶¹ The weather in late December 1943-January 1944 also caused morale to slump, as soldiers faced heavy rains and occasional snow.¹⁶² One soldier of the 48th Highlanders of Canada wrote a poem titled *Winter on the Arielli*, which defined the situation as "the road to Rome [being] mud-

¹⁵⁶ Roy, 276.

¹⁵⁷ Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 56.

¹⁵⁸ No. 4 Cdn Field Ambulance, RCAMC War Diary, 1 Jan 44 to 31 Jan 44, 4 January 1944, RG-24-C-2, Volume: 15850, LAC.

¹⁵⁹ Copp and McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, 56.

¹⁶⁰ Cameron, 69.

¹⁶¹ Loyal Edmonton Regiment War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 27 December 1943, LAC.

¹⁶² Colonel A.J. Kerry and Major W.A. McDill, *The History of the Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers, 1936-1946*, Volume II (Ottawa: The Military Engineers Association of Canada, Ottawa, 1966), 169.

locked,” “our armour is bogged and helpless,” and that “the gullies brim and flood”.¹⁶³ The only benefit of the heavy rains for the soldiers was that it exposed minefields in the area.¹⁶⁴

The enemy’s proximity further influenced the physical and psychological state of the soldiers and civilians. Sporadic German shelling of the town continued to inflict casualties into 1944. The war diary of the 5th Field Ambulance reported that on 30 December the hospital in Ortona “continued admitting throughout the night as the vicinity was mortared.”¹⁶⁵ The Germans had withdrawn just three thousand yards away and continued to shell central parts of the town.¹⁶⁶ Ortona faced shelling even into April 1944 when a shell came crashing through the roof of the town theatre during military church services on Palm Sunday, though without causing casualties.¹⁶⁷ Although battered, the Ortonesi and Canadians refused to succumb. The only option for both groups was to begin rebuilding Ortona to serve the needs of the Canadian soldiers and to re-establish a level of normality for the citizens of this sea-side town. Each group could help the other and each proceeded to do so.

The Roles of the Town Major, Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories, and the Civil Affairs Officer

The Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada were ordered to garrison Ortona for the first two weeks after the battle. Both regiments were assigned to

¹⁶³ Beattie, 493.

¹⁶⁴ Kerry and McDill, *The History of the Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers, 1936-1946*, 177.

¹⁶⁵ 5th Field Ambulance, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps War Diaries 1943/01-1944/07, 30 December 1943, RG-24-C-3, Volume 15856, LAC.

¹⁶⁶ Ops -1 Cdn Inf Div, CMF Acct by Capt GMC Sprung MC. G-3 I 1 Cdn Div given to Capt Hughes in San Vito area 3 Jan 4, 1, 234C1.011 (D3), DHH. According to Tommaso Cespa, during the first days of January 1944 the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada played bag pipes in the town while on parade, until it was noticed that whenever they played the Germans directed mortar fire at them.

¹⁶⁷ Mowat, *The Regiment*, 165-166.

assist in the rehabilitation of the town for the civilian population and for their fellow soldiers.¹⁶⁸ The responsibility of coordinating the rebuilding of Ortona did not fall solely on the shoulders of the infantrymen. The day after the battle, officials from the Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories (AMGOT) arrived.¹⁶⁹ However, the Canadian Civil Affairs Officer and the appointed Town Major of Ortona would also provide support. All three groups would have separate but linked responsibilities in coordinating in the rebuilding process.

The Canadian Civil Affairs Officer's mandate "was to assist military commanders in forward battle areas by liaising with Italian civil authorities and solving any unrest hampering the activities of the fighting troops."¹⁷⁰ When necessary and possible, the Civil Affairs Officer was also to exercise administrative control and supervision of any existing civil machinery to benefit the Allied war effort.¹⁷¹ The responsibilities of the Canadian Civil Affairs Officer also extended into the field of employing labour when needed for both military and non-military related projects.¹⁷²

AMGOT's role in a liberated Italian town was threefold. It was "to relieve combat troops of the necessity of providing civil administration by restoring law and order and normal conditions among the civil population." Moreover, AMGOT was empowered to "procure the necessary supplies and where necessary provide relief and maintenance for destitute civilians" in addition "[t]o assist[ing] in making available to the occupying forces

¹⁶⁸ Stevens, *A City Goes to War*, 282.

¹⁶⁹ Roy, 271. The term Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories or AMGOT was used until January 1944. Allied Government reports begin to use the name Allied Military Government or AMG by February 1944 and continued to do so until the end of the war.

¹⁷⁰ Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. 3, CMHQ Report 140 (Copy 2), DHH.

¹⁷¹ *Civil Affairs Handbook ITALY, Section 2, Supplement Allied Military Government Manual of the World War*, Army Service Force Headquarters, 27 November 1943 (Armed Service Forces: Capricorn House, 2007), 80.

¹⁷² Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government, Appendix B, 4-5, DHH.

the economic resources of the occupied territory and to promote political and military objectives of the Allied forces in connection with future operations through efficient governance of the territory.”¹⁷³ On 17 February 1944, the responsibilities held by the Allied Military Government (AMG) and Civil Affairs Officer were taken over by the newly established Italian government in parts of the Italy lying south of the northern boundaries of the provinces of Salerno, Potenza, Bari, Sicily, and Sardinia.¹⁷⁴ Italian government authority did not extend as far north as Ortona during the Canadians occupation, given that it was too close to the battle area.

The Town Major was an appointed Army Major whose sole task was the care of the soldiers in an occupied town. His responsibilities included organizing billets and the employment of civilians to assist units with translation services and various forms of skilled services or labour.¹⁷⁵ The only authorities that held independent hiring authority over the Town Major were AMG officials, Civil Affairs Officers, and medical units.¹⁷⁶ Military control over Ortona was initiated almost immediately upon liberation and lasted until the end of April 1944.

Billets

Upon entering the town in late December, the Canadians had to locate safe and comfortable billets. Not just any structure would do. Soldiers had to locate buildings without booby-traps, mines, or leaking roofs - a formidable task.¹⁷⁷ Corporal Bill Teleske of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment found his billet in a vacant shoemaker's house, located across

¹⁷³ Ibid, 4.

¹⁷⁴ ADM-1 Cdn Corps CMF Report on Adm Situation Southern Italy, 1, 224C1.056 (D8), DHH.

¹⁷⁵ Labour 9/13/1943-3/9/1945, 3, 239C1. (D12), DHH.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 3.

¹⁷⁷ Roy, 277.

the street from *La Basilica San Tommaso*.¹⁷⁸ Protocol dictated that the Town Major coordinate with local Italian authorities in regards to billeting management.¹⁷⁹ But in the case of Ortona, vacated homes were immediately occupied by soldiers on 29 December.¹⁸⁰ This may have been because the houses were empty of inhabitants after the battle, and Allied billeting procedures allowed soldiers to occupy abandoned homes.¹⁸¹ Certain buildings were requisitioned for practical purposes. The officers and soldiers of the 5th Field Ambulance initially found billets within the Vittoria Theatre in town as it was conveniently located across the street from the military hospital. By billeting in the theatre, the 5th Field Ambulance made other habitable buildings available to soldiers of other regiments. Once Ortona began to function more as a leave centre, the 5th Field Ambulance vacated the theatre due to the Auxiliary Services' need of the facility to run shows.¹⁸²

Many of the Canadian soldiers found that their billets offered a stark contrast in accommodations after occupying slit trenches and bivouac tents during the early weeks of December 1943.¹⁸³ Corporal Bill Teleske recalled that "it was nice to have a roof over your head and everyone in our regiment was provided with a billet."¹⁸⁴ In some cases soldiers tried to furnish their billets by requisitioning items from other buildings. Soldiers of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada scrounged from bombed out houses for extra furniture to make their billets as comfortable as possible.¹⁸⁵ This was not the only case of Canadian soldiers scrounging furniture. The photo on the following page shows Canadian soldiers

¹⁷⁸ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

¹⁷⁹ *Civil Affairs Handbook ITALY Section 2, Supplement Allied Military Government Manual of the World War*, 83.

¹⁸⁰ Seaforth Highlanders of Canada War Diaries 1943/06-1944, 29 December 1943, LAC.

¹⁸¹ Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces In Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Pt V, 14,15,16,17,18,19& 20, 11, Section G, 952.013 (D45HH), DHH.

¹⁸² 5th Field Ambulance War Diaries 1943/01-1944/07, 3 February 1944, LAC.

¹⁸³ Strome Galloway, *A Regiment at War*, 128.

¹⁸⁴ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

¹⁸⁵ Roy, 277.

carrying commandeered furniture from vacated houses to be used at the YMCA in St. Vito.¹⁸⁶ Some was taken by the Canadians for billets and leave facilities' other furniture was given freely by the Italians. In the case of the Monastery Inn, the furnishings were "donated by the grateful citizens of Ortona."¹⁸⁷ According to official sources, the "Monastery Inn was a leave hostel that was made available to soldiers and was operated by the Auxiliary Services."¹⁸⁸

While the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and Seaforth Highlanders of Canada occupied billets in Ortona, other regiments found billets in the farm houses and hamlets to the south of the town. For example Lanfranco Berardi remembers Canadian soldiers living with his family.¹⁸⁹



4: Soldiers carrying commandeered furniture in San Vito. 112.3P1 (D1078), DHH.

It was Allied protocol that when "quartering troops in private dwellings some rooms should be left to the inhabitants."¹⁹⁰ As the Canadians had assumed the responsibility for returning the town to a level of normality, initiatives were implemented to ensure that the Italians were safe within the dwellings they inhabited. In some scenarios the Canadians did not occupy habitable houses, but inspected them to determine whether they could potentially collapse on

¹⁸⁶ DPR Photos of hospitality and recreational photos of Cdn Forces in Italy. 112.3P1 (D1078), 18 December 1943, DHH. St. Vito is a hamlet south of Ortona that was also used by the 1st Canadian Infantry Division for billeting soldiers.

¹⁸⁷ The Salvation Army Canadian War Service Announcement, "The gala opening of the Monastery Inn", No. 2 Canadian Field Hygiene Section War Diary, RCAMC – 1 to 29 Feb 44, 6 February 1944, RG-24-C-2, Volume 15927, LAC.

¹⁸⁸ Loyal Edmonton Regiment, War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 6 February 1944, LAC.

¹⁸⁹ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

¹⁹⁰ Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces In Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Pt V, 14,15,16,17,18,19& 20, 11, DHH.

civilians. Francesca Lasorda remembered Canadian soldiers coming to her family home the first week of January 1944 to make sure that the house was safe to live in.¹⁹¹ Not all Italians would be as lucky. On the night of 28 February 1944, one fractured home collapsed, killing several Ortonesi.¹⁹²

Some villages to the south of Ortona lacked sufficient intact homes to billet civilians and soldiers. On 13 February 1944 Allied Military Government officials evacuated the civilians in the town of St. Vito to provide every soldier of the Royal Canadian Regiment with a billet.¹⁹³ This was also the case for the Italians in the town of San Nicola as the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment needed all the remaining habitable houses.¹⁹⁴ In most cases, the Italians were transferred to refugee camps that had been established in nine different areas south of the Adriatic front.¹⁹⁵ Some Italians refused to be evacuated south and instead opted to move into the caves they had formerly occupied during the fighting. Although it was an inconvenience for many Ortonesi, there was one major benefit to returning to the caves. Ortona and other hamlets in the vicinity still suffered shelling from the Germans, and the caves once again provided them with a level of protection that their homes could not. Franco D'Adamo and his family lived in a cave for two months after liberation.¹⁹⁶ The Italians that occupied these caves formed small communities and tried to live as normally as possible. The photo on the following page shows Italians standing beside

¹⁹¹ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

¹⁹² 9th Canadian Field Ambulance War Diary 02/1944, 28 February 1944, RG-24-C-3, Volume: 15863, LAC.

¹⁹³ G.R. Stevens, *The Royal Canadian Regiment 1933-1966*, Volume Two (London: London Printing and Lithographing Co Limited, 1967), 125.

¹⁹⁴ Cameron, 70.

¹⁹⁵ *A Review of Allied Military Government and of the Allied Commission in Italy, July 10, 1943 to May 2 1945*, Allied Commission, Public Relations Branch Allied Commission APO 394 U.S. Army, 34.

¹⁹⁶ Franco D'Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009.

their caves outside of Ortona on 15 February 1944. Furniture and clothes were things commonly found outside of a typical household.¹⁹⁷

Although in some cases Italians were forced to evacuate their homes, they did have a right to protect their property from damages. To keep the billets in and around Ortona in proper standing they were regularly inspected. In most cases the inspection of billets was undertaken by the Town Major and officers of the No. 2 Canadian Field Hygiene Section, as was done on 11 March 1944.¹⁹⁸

Occasionally, senior officers inspected soldiers' billets. During the first week of January Lieutenant-General H.D.G. Crerar and Brigadier B.M. Hoffmeister examined the billets of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment to personally evaluate the living quarters of their troops.¹⁹⁹ The inspection of billets served three purposes: to assess the condition of Italian



5: Italians outside of caves south of Ortona. 112.3P1 (D1110), DHH.

¹⁹⁷ DPR Photos of War Correspondents in Italy – 1944, 15 February 1944, 112.3P1 (D1110), DHH.

¹⁹⁸ No. 2 Canadian Field Hygiene Section War Diary, RCAMC – 1 to 31 Mar 44, 11 March 1944, RG-24-C-2, Volume 15927, LAC.

¹⁹⁹ Loyal Edmonton Regiment War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 5 January 1944, LAC.

property; to monitor the condition of the billet itself for assessing its suitability for use by other regiments; and to confirm that the living conditions of the soldiers would not cause them health problems.²⁰⁰

Often, billets detracted from the soldiers' quality of life. Corporal Bill Teleske stated that "every soldier had to watch out for bed bugs and lice in their billets."²⁰¹ If a billet was damaged in any form by the occupying troops, the Italian owner was provided with the opportunity to make damage claims to the commanding officer of the unit that had billeted there. If the commanding officer agreed with the Italian owner that the Canadian Army damaged the property, the claim was referred to the Local Claims Officer or Claims Commission for payment.²⁰² The opportunity to lay claims for damaged property also extended to personal possessions. Francesca Lasorda recalled that there had been a claims office in Ortona where she could be provided with papers protecting her property from being claimed by other Italians or Canadian soldiers. But as Lasorda noted, this system did not always function properly. On one occasion, an Italian woman tried to lay claim to a bicycle found by a Canadian soldier in a blown out house. The woman claimed it was hers, even though it was not. Still, the soldier told her to go the claims office and get a receipt for it.²⁰³ Although an imperfect system, the ability of the Ortonesi to lay claim to their property and request compensation for damages provided them with assurances that they still held ownership. This was a far cry from the German approach, which had forced many Ortonesi to abandon their homes for demolition without any compensation.²⁰⁴ On the other hand,

²⁰⁰ No. 2 Canadian Field Hygiene Section War Diary, RCAMC – 1 to 31 Mar 44, 11 March, 1944, LAC.

²⁰¹ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

²⁰² Accommodations of Troops in Theatres of War Other Than the U.K, 1943/04-1944/03, 3, RG-24-C-2, Volume 12675, LAC.

²⁰³ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

²⁰⁴ Please see Chapter 1 for reference to German destruction of Italian property.

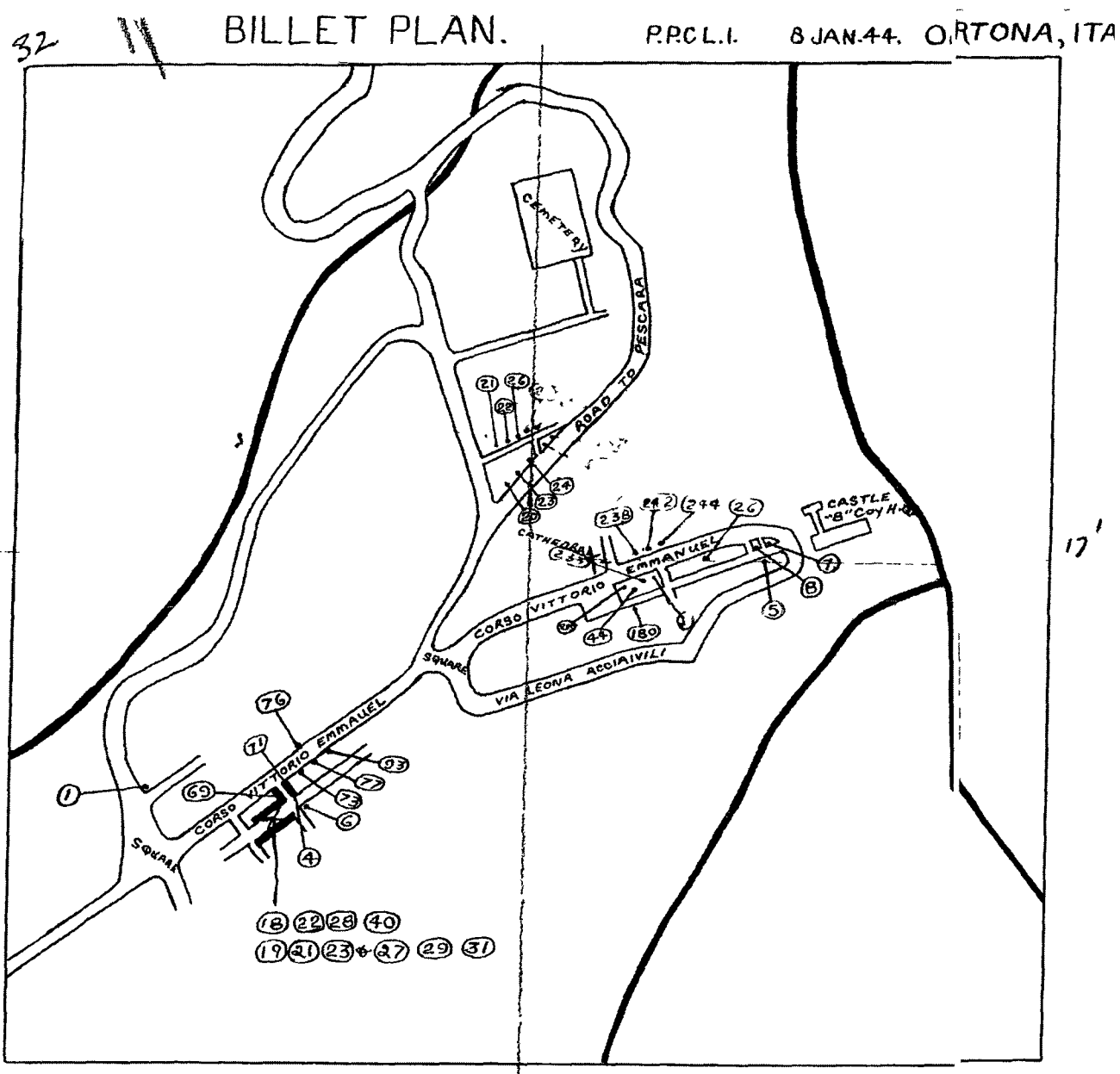
there was no protocol for compensation of items looted by Canadian soldiers. Infantrymen of the Perth Regiment discovered a cache of fine clothing and jewelry inside a wheat vat that had been placed under the floor boards of a house north of Ortona. These items were confiscated by the soldiers, and some eventually found their way to Canada.²⁰⁵ Since many Italians died during the fighting, and if there was no one to lay claim to the property, the troops regarded it as reasonable to seize it.

After two weeks in the town the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and Seaforth Highlanders of Canada were rotated to the front and other regiments took over their billets. By mid-January the billeting system became so organized that officers from the billeted regiments created maps outlining the town's billeting plan. The billeting plan shown below is from the war diary of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry during that unit's occupation of Ortona on 8 January 1944.²⁰⁶ The plan provides a complete legend of the streets on which the billets could be found and names the units which occupied the billets during the stated period. This billeting plan would be instrumental during the rotation of regiments. The billets in Ortona continued to be used by infantrymen on leave until 6 February 1944, when the Monastery Inn was opened.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Scoslowski, *Not All of Us Were Brave*, 111-112.

²⁰⁶ Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Active Service Force War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 8 January 1944, RG-24-C-3, Volume: 15156, LAC. The billeting plan and legend were copied as two separate pages by Library and Archives Canada. The original copy of the billeting plan is only one page.

²⁰⁷ Loyal Edmonton Regiment, War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 6 February 1944, LAC.



6: Billeting plan of P.P.C.L.I. in Ortona. RG-24-C-3, Volume: 15156, LAC

36-17-1

JAN-44

LEGEND:-VIA DEL TERTRO:-

- (4) Bn H.Q. (C.O., ADJ, Bn ORDERLY ROOM, OFFR'S MESS).
- (4) C.O., 2 i/c, & BATMEN (BILLETS).
- (69) SIGNAL EXCHANGE & BILLETS.
- (71) GUARD ROOM.

VIA PANTALEONA LAPINO:-

- (1) R.A.P.

CORSO VITTORIO EMMANUEL:-

- (73) R.Q.M.
- (76) POST OFFICE.
- (77) PAY OFFICE.
- (93) SCOUTS & SNIFERS.

VIA SAPIENZA:-

- (18) SHOEMAKERS WORKSHOP & BILLETS.
- (19) MEN'S LATRINE.
- (21) "I" Sec. BILLETS.
- (22) H.Q. STORES.
- (23) & (27) PIONEER WORKSHOP.
- (29) OFFR'S LATRINE.
- (31) Bn H.Q. COOKHOUSE.
- (40) PIONEER COOKHOUSE & BILLETS.
- (28) R.Ps & R.S.M.

"A" Coy.:-

- (20) Coy H.Q.
- (21) 8 Pln.
- (22) 8 Pln.
- (23)
- (24) 7 Pln.
- (26) 9 Pln.

"B" Coy.:-

- (5) 11 Pln H.Q.
- (7) 11 Pln.
- (8) 11 Pln.
- (44) 10 Pln.
- (180) 10 Pln.
- (255) 12 Pln.

"C" Coy.:-

- (1) OFFR'S MESS.
- (20) Coy H.Q. & CANTEEN.
- (23) 15 Pln & AEGT L BARBER.
- (238) 14 Pln & SGT'S MESS.
- (242) 13 Pln.
- (244) 13 Pln.

NOTE:- ENCIRCLED NUMBERS THAT OF HOUSE.

B. J. Howe.

"I" Sec. P.P.C.L.I.

As one article entitled “Rest Town” from the 15 January 1944 edition of the *Red Patch*, the 1st Canadian Division’s front-line newspaper noted, “Ortona began to represent a place where the Canadians could feel at home for 48 hours.”²⁰⁸ The transition from living in slit trenches and caves in the forward areas to warm and dry billets began to alter the attitude of the Canadian soldier.²⁰⁹ The provision of billets for troops played an important role in the steady increase in morale in the Ortona area.²¹⁰ Morale was of great importance not only in regards to the fighting ability of the Canadian soldier, but also for the civilian population. Happy soldiers make better guests than frustrated ones. Another article from the *Red Patch* entitled, “You are now entering Ortona a West Canadian Town,” referred to Ortona as “a place that is on every soldier’s tongue and it’s hard to imagine a day not passing that Ortona is not mentioned by each of us at least once.”²¹¹ The Canadians enthusiasm for the town was not solely based on the billets offered, but they did play role in the overall positive impression of the town for the soldiers who visited.

The Dangers That Lingered

Although the Germans had vacated the immediate vicinity, Ortona was not safe by any means. As the Germans had scattered mines and booby-traps throughout the town before departing. During the fighting, soldiers of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada continuously entered mined houses. Maurice White, a Corporal in the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, recalled that the Germans had set-up numerous booby-traps

²⁰⁸ “Rest Town”, *The Red Patch* – Canada’s Frontline Newspaper - First Canadian Division – Central Mediterranean Force – Volume 2 – No. 12, Italy, 15 January 1944, CWM, 1.

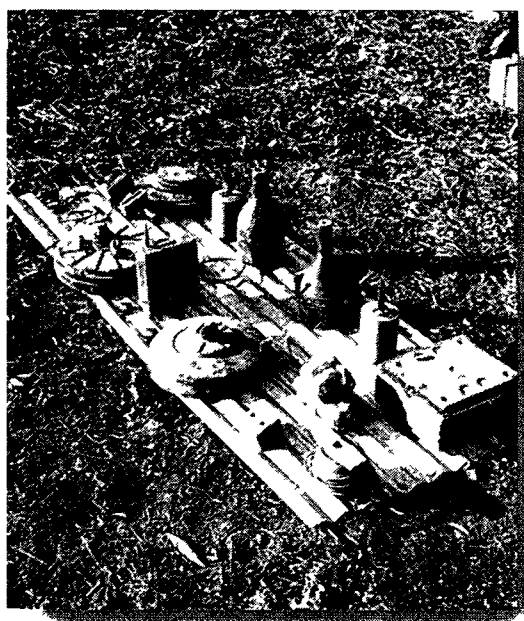
²⁰⁹ Thomas H Raddall, *West Nova: A History of the West Nova Scotia Regiment* (Liverpool, N.S.: By Author, 1947), 178.

²¹⁰ Roy, 277.

²¹¹ “You are now entering Ortona a West Canadian Town”, *The Red Patch*, Volume 2 – No. 23, 1 April 1944, CWM, 3.

in buildings, usually by taking something that looked like a good souvenir and placing an explosive attached to it.²¹² Not all explosives were as easy to detect. In the closing days of the battle, the Germans began to blow up entire houses to slow the Canadian advance.²¹³ In one case, twenty men and one officer of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment were buried alive on 27 December 1943, with only one soldier surviving the attack. Retribution by the Loyal Edmonton Regiment for this act saw charges being placed in two houses to be blown up once the Germans reoccupied them.²¹⁴ Many of these explosives were buried under houses or were placed inside the walls and remained undetonated after the fighting.

The variety of explosives used also caused problems for the Canadians. The Germans planted every type of explosive they could acquire and the greater variety of devices increased the difficulty of disarmament. The photograph to the right displays the variety of mines and booby-traps removed by the Royal Canadian Engineers in Ortona. These included



8: Mines and explosives removed from Ortona. 112.3P1 (D1163), DHH.

“Igniting Mark III Teller Mines with detonators and booby-trap attachments, prepared 5 lb charges, Igniting Adapter Mark II Teller Mines, High Explosives, Mark IV Teller Mines,

²¹² Maurice White interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

²¹³ Loyal Edmonton Regiment War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 27 December 1943, LAC.

²¹⁴ Operations of 1st Canadian Infantry Division and 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade in Italy 25 Nov 1943 – 4 Jan 1944, 89-90, LAC.

boxes of detonators, S Mines, Magnetic Beehive Mines and Italian Box Mines.”²¹⁵ Each model of explosive and mine provided different challenges in disarming.

After the battle, war correspondent Matthew Halton recalled that “as I stepped forward I was pulled back by the officer with me. He bent down and picked up a piece of paper, set with cunning artlessness over a buried mine.”²¹⁶ The Germans had made a habit of “placing anti-personnel or S Mines in vineyards and orchards, fields and gardens and in likely approaches, intersections and cross-roads.”²¹⁷ Corporal Bill Teleske recalled seeing apples wired with explosives and grape vines with mines attached to them beside houses to the south of Ortona.²¹⁸ This tactic extended the time needed to clear an area. If the booby-traps and mines did not directly hamper the advance, many were left alone during the battle. But they were not always disarmed after the battle, occasionally with catastrophic results. The danger to returning refugees was evident. Many of the mines and explosives had been placed within their homes or along the roads and hillsides that they would use to return. A civil affairs report on mines and civilian casualties reflected that minefields in the countryside of Italy resulted in high casualty rates, even when the area had been ‘cleared’. These minefields also had the effect of making the agricultural lands unworkable.²¹⁹ With little understanding of the dangers that lingered in their fields, or due to the necessity of needing to grow food, many Ortonesi had to gamble with their lives by returning to their farms.²²⁰ In most cases, Italians had no experience dealing with explosives. Tommaso Carceni remembers that when he climbed the hill between the town and port he came across dozens of mines. Carceni was

²¹⁵ DPR Photos of 1 Cdn Corps Engrs in Italy – 1944, 13 January 1944, 112.3P1 (D1163), DHH.

²¹⁶ Dancocks, 186.

²¹⁷ Historical Records Operations Cdn Forces A.A.I – Canadian Operations Italy Sept 43 – Jan 44 by Lt Col Jack Pangman, Carleton and York Regiment, 164, RG-24-C-3, Volume 12944, LAC.

²¹⁸ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

²¹⁹ Civil Affairs in the Mediterranean June 1943 – May 1945, 11, Report No 45, Historical Section Army Headquarters, DHH.

²²⁰ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

lucky as he was able to avoid them during his hike, but some of his friends died during the following days while making the same trek.²²¹ Many of his fellow Ortonesi were killed or injured by explosives upon returning to their homes. For example, one Italian died and wounded others around him when he struck a Teller mine while digging amongst the ruins in the town.²²²

The approach used by the Canadians to deal with mines and booby-traps was twofold. The first steps were undertaken by Canadian Army engineers. On 15 January 1944, the 10th Field Squadron, Royal Canadian Engineers began minesweeping in Ortona and created mine warning signs to indicate where minefields had been found.²²³ In some parts of the countryside, Canadian engineers advertised locations in which mines had been found by placing white tape around a perimeter.²²⁴ Photographic evidence demonstrates the process used by Canadian engineers in the detecting and disarming of mines along the roads and the outskirts of the town in early January 1944. In the photo to the right, Sapper G.C. Bullock and Sapper R.T. Gilpin use a Polish mine detector.²²⁵ In the photo to the left on the next page, Sergeant A. Kerr



9: Sapper G.C. Bullock and Sapper R.T. Gilpin with Polish mine detector. 112.3P1 (D1163), DHH.

²²¹ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

²²² Roy, 278.

²²³ 10th Field Squadron Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers War Diary 1944/01, 15 January 1944, RG-24-C-3, Volume: 14770, LAC.

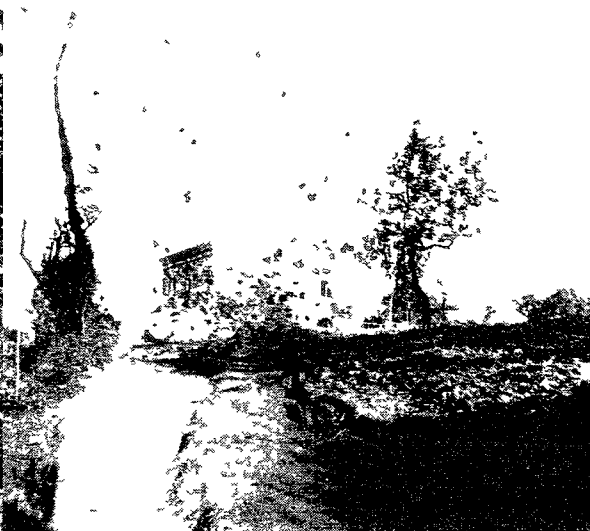
²²⁴ Scislowski, 143.

²²⁵ DPR Photos of 1 Cdn Corps Engrs in Italy – 1944, 13 January 1944, DHH.

uses a rope to pull the discovered mine from the ground.²²⁶ Afterwards, in the photo to the right, the mine was blown up with other explosives at an undisclosed location south of Ortona.²²⁷ The Royal Canadian Engineers continued the process of searching and clearing mines in the Ortona well into February 1944.²²⁸



10: Sergeant A. Kerr removing a mine. 112.3P1 (D1163), DHH.



11: Detonation of mines and other explosives. 112.3P1 (D1163), DHH.

Infantrymen were also used to clear mines. During the battle, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment had a pioneer platoon that worked tirelessly to disable explosive devices.²²⁹ The pioneer platoon of the West Nova Scotia Regiment defined the clearing of mines in Ortona as a “herculean task.”²³⁰ In most cases “we had to deal with booby-traps ourselves, because we did not have time to wait” recalled Corporal Maurice White.²³¹ This work continued after the battle. Often, infantrymen had not been trained to deal with these dangers. By 15 January 1944, the 1st Canadian Corps Engineers established a mine and booby-trap school

²²⁶ Ibid, 13 January 1944

²²⁷ Ibid, 13 January 1944

²²⁸ Civil Affairs-Allied Military Government-- Reports Feb 3-9th, 1944, 14, 224C1 053 (D8), DHH

²²⁹ Bill Teleske interview with the author, March 2010.

²³⁰ Raddall, 173

²³¹ Maurice White interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

near Ortona to educate the common soldier on the removal of explosives. The picture on the following page shows soldiers being trained at the school.²³² The Royal 22e Régiment's war diary reported that its soldiers removed nine booby-traps on 20 February. The clearing of mines was not an exact science for any soldier. During the 20 February mission one soldier was wounded when one of the booby-traps exploded.²³³



12: Canadian soldiers attending a class at the mine and booby-trap school. 112.3P1 (D1163), DHH.

The removal of mines did not solely focus on the buildings, streets, and farms that the soldiers occupied. Tommaso Cespa recalled seeing Canadians clearing mines in and around the houses solely occupied by Italians.²³⁴ The photo below is of Paul Morton, a *Toronto Star* correspondent, pointing to a mine outside of an Ortonese dwelling. The description attached with this photo reported that "other mines attached with trip wires were removed from this area."²³⁵



13: Paul Morton of the *Toronto Star* pointing to a mine outside of an Italian household. 112.3P1 (D1110), DHH.

Italians also played an active role in the process of removing mines and booby traps.

²³² DPR Photos of 1 Cdn Corps Engrs in Italy – 1944, 13 January 1944, DHH

²³³ Royal 22e Regiment, Active Service Force War Diaries 1943/03-1944/03, 20 February 1944, RG-24-C-3, Volume 15238, LAC

²³⁴ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009

²³⁵ DPR Photos of War Correspondents in Italy – 1944, 15 January 1944, 112 3P1 (D1110), DHH

The AMG and civil affairs officers took reports from civilians on the locations of mines and booby traps for removal.²³⁶ Many Ortonesi farmers became very active in reporting mines to the authorities as they were dependent on being able to work their agricultural lands, which were usually full of explosive devices.²³⁷

The clearing of these dangers provided a higher level of mobility in and around the town, allowing many Italians to begin rebuilding their lives in a safe environment. For the Canadian soldiers it allowed them to break from the routine of insecurity; Ortona would become a place where one did not have to watch for trip wires or minefields. The process to establish Ortona and the areas surrounding as completely safe of mines would take a long time and many civilians and soldiers would continue to be killed or injured from explosives. Tommaso Cespa noted that one night he had heard crying in a house across the street. He later found out that one of his neighbors had been killed by an explosive device. Such occurrences were common: most of these mines only revealed themselves after exploding.²³⁸

Medical Assistance and Disease Control

During the fighting, Canadian Army medical units had provided assistance to Ortonesi and soldiers alike. The 5th Field Ambulance had established a hospital in the town's orphanage near the end of the battle and continued to use the facility.²³⁹ While principally for military casualties, the 5th Field Ambulance also set up a civilian ward in December 1943, since the town's hospital had been badly damaged during the fighting.²⁴⁰ While local

²³⁶ C.R.S Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy 1943-1945* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957), 157.

²³⁷ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

²³⁸ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.: Kerry and McDill, 169.

²³⁹ Rudy Deutsch interview with the author, 25 January 2010.

²⁴⁰ Toncelli, Minute 42: Rudy Deutsch interview with author, 25 January 2010.

authorities quickly reconstructed a separate medical facility for local inhabitants,²⁴¹ some civilian injuries still required military medical assistance. For example on 23 January 1944 “a young Italian was taken to the military hospital. He injured his face, caused by a German hand grenade when he picked it up.”²⁴² There is no account of the condition of the re-established civilian hospital, but accounts note several occasions in which locals were treated for sickness or wounds by the 5th Field Ambulance throughout February 1944.²⁴³ Canadian physicians also ventured into the countryside south of the town to provide medical assistance to Italians who were unable to travel. Lanfranco Berardi recalled that when his grandmother became ill, Canadian military doctors came to his home to provide assistance.²⁴⁴ In many cases, for Italians in the countryside and for those within Ortona, the only outlet to acquire medical treatment with proper supplies was through the Canadians. The Ortonesi’s dependency on medical aid provided the Canadians with another opportunity to develop their image as compassionate and helpful liberators. Some Ortonesi attribute their survival and the survival of some of their family members to the medical treatment that was provided by the Canadians.²⁴⁵

At times disease and infection plagued the beleaguered Canadian infantry. Upon the liberation of Ortona the Canadian Army tried to control the spread of diseases. For example, on 5 January 1944, soldiers of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment were given anti-typhus inoculations in Ortona.²⁴⁶ The soldiers were also provided clean water from decontamination

²⁴¹ 5th Field Ambulance War Diaries 1943/01-1944/07, 30 December 1943, LAC.

²⁴² The Cape Breton Highlanders War Diary 1944/01 – 1944/01, 23 January 1944, RG-24-C-3, Volume: 15047, LAC.

²⁴³ 5th Field Ambulance War Diaries 1943/01-1944/07, 14 February 1944, LAC.

²⁴⁴ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

²⁴⁵ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

²⁴⁶ Loyal Edmonton Regiment War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 5 January 1944, LAC.

trucks.²⁴⁷ The 2nd Canadian Field Hygiene Section played a major role in controlling the spread of diseases and infections in the town. This process involved providing Canadian soldiers with the cleanest possible environment in which to live and work. On 25 January 1944, the unit “established disinfection stations and improvised showers.” The following week they began “inspecting billets and brothels and set up latrines in Ortona.”²⁴⁸ Mobile baths and clean laundry were also provided, but Corporal Bill Teleske recalled that “they didn’t come around very often.”²⁴⁹ Soldiers were also inspected for fleas and body lice on a regular basis.²⁵⁰

The return of Italians to the town brought about other measures to protect soldiers. Once commerce restarted all civilian shops were out of bounds for troops until they became certified satisfactory by the 2nd Canadian Field Hygiene Section.²⁵¹ Although no war brides were brought back to Canada from Ortona, sexual relations did occur between Italian women and Canadian soldiers.²⁵² Many Italian men had been taken into the custody of the Germans or were still trying to make their way back to Ortona from the various military outposts that they had occupied during their service in the Italian military. This left many Italian households without male patriarchs to provide a level of protection from young soldiers’ advances. To avoid complications, Canadian officers frequently asked that Italian women leave households in which troops were billeted, if they had no male family members who could act as chaperons. Emilia Polidoro remembered Canadian soldiers asking her father to take her family elsewhere. The Canadians had established a billet in the Polidoro

²⁴⁷ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

²⁴⁸ No. 2 Canadian Field Hygiene Section War Diary, RCAMC – 1 to 30 Jan 44, 25 January 1944 and 1 February 1944, LAC.

²⁴⁹ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

²⁵⁰ Loyal Edmonton Regiment War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 8 January 1944, LAC.

²⁵¹ Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry War Diary, Lieut-Col. C.B Ware. D.S.O., Commanding Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, Order Issue No 9, 23 February 1944, LAC.

²⁵² Maclean and Vokes, *My Story*, 144-145.

home and, as Emilia's father was the only male in the household, the Canadians desired that they leave to avoid any complications.²⁵³ Attempts to regulate intimate relations had much to do with limiting the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Venereal diseases (VD) were a major concern for the Canadian Army in Italy. To combat the spread of VD control officers were appointed to educate soldiers and provide them with condoms and prophylactic kits.²⁵⁴ But the Canadian Army did not stop with just educating soldiers. Allied protocol dictated that "all known brothels in a liberated area will be put out of bounds to all Allied troops and [that] arrangements must be made with local administrations for the examination of women arrested for prostitution."²⁵⁵ For the first six weeks of 1944, "forty-six females in the area of Ortona were examined for VD."²⁵⁶ By the end of February, the unit had evacuated four prostitutes who had tested positive for VD.²⁵⁷

The Canadians also aided the civilian population in combating the spread of diseases. The lack of solid standing structures meant that locals were forced into crowded lodgings. Often, Ortonesi shared more than just living space. As one survivor remembered, "It was hard to stay clean and there were a lot of lice."²⁵⁸ With interactions occurring on a daily basis between civilians and soldiers in the town, the Canadian Army took initiatives to solve some of the hygiene problems affecting Italians. Canadian Civil Affairs officers and Allied Military Government officials were able to coordinate the "repair of the reservoir and water pipes in Ortona" for both civilian and military purposes on 8 February 1944.²⁵⁹ Although

²⁵³ Emilia Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

²⁵⁴ Keshen, 249.

²⁵⁵ Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces In Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Pt V, 14,15,16,17,18,19& 20, Annex 1, 3, DHH.

²⁵⁶ No. 1 CDN L of C Provost Company (Including Nos 1, 2, 3, and 4 L of C Sections) – 01 – 29 Feb 44, 12 February 1944, RG-24-C-3, Volume 16508, LAC.

²⁵⁷ No. 2 Canadian Field Hygiene Section War Diary, RCAMC – 1 to 29 Feb 44, 28 February 1944, LAC.

²⁵⁸ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

²⁵⁹ Reports – Civil Affairs Allied Military Government, 13, 224C1.053 (D8), DHH.

taking place more than a month after liberation, these repairs greatly assisted the Italians to return to normality and healthy living conditions.

Hygiene Sections also undertook an immunization program against the spread of typhus. Troops were issued personal kits of dusting powder while gasoline-driven air compression units were also employed to combat the disease. This permitted hundreds of civilians and soldiers to be dusted for lice in a short time frame.²⁶⁰ One Canadian soldier stationed near Ortona received a personal four-pound container containing AL63, a powder used for dealing with lice.²⁶¹

The Canadian Army also raised awareness about the symptoms and transmission of typhus to troops in an effort to deter its spread. The picture on the following page shows Canadian soldiers of the Three Rivers Regiment reviewing a typhus warning sign in the town of San Leonardo on 26 January 1944.²⁶² Even with these measures, not all diseases could be controlled. On 19 February 1944 “cases of Enteric (Typhoid) Fever” were reported in Ortona.²⁶³ Still these deterrent approaches provided Canadians and Italians alike with the means to combat the spread of diseases and infections and thus interact without alienating one group from the other.

²⁶⁰ W. R. Feasby, B.A., M.D., *Official History of the Canadian Medical Services 1939-1945*, Volume Two, Clinical Subjects (Ottawa: Published by Authority of the Minister of National Defence, 1953), 143.

²⁶¹ Cameron, 100.

²⁶² DPR Photos of Three Rivers Regiment in Italy – Jan 44, 26 January 1944, 112.3P1 (D1152), DHH.

²⁶³ Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry War Diaries 1943/09 1944/06, 19 February 1944, LAC.



14: Canadian soldiers of the Three Rivers Regiment reviewing a typhus warning sign in the town of San Leonardo. 112.3P1 (D1152), DHH.

Security and Policing in Ortona

Since the Sicilian Campaign in July 1943, the Town Majors, Civil Affairs Officers and AMGOT officials had cooperated with town administrators and *Carabinieri* and *Guarda di Finanza*, to assist in the establishment of civil order in liberated areas.²⁶⁴ Immediately upon entry into a newly liberated community AMGOT officials posted a proclamation of instructions for civilians.²⁶⁵ These instructions mainly focused on the rights of civilians over their property, the introduction of an Allied-controlled currency as legal tender, the establishment of price controls on various commodities, and the requisitioning of any

²⁶⁴ Department of External Affairs, *Report on Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories in Italy*. RG 25, Volume 5710, File 7-Z (S) Part 1, LAC.

²⁶⁵ Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces In Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Pt V, 14,15,16,17,18,19& 20, 12, DHH.

abandoned enemy supplies.²⁶⁶ None of the articles mentioned security or policing in a liberated area.

The signing of the armistice between Italy and the Allies and previous positive interactions did not prevent Canadian soldiers from considering local civilians as a potential security risk. As a result, controlling the civilian population was one of the largest initiatives undertaken by the Canadian Army in the region. One AMGOT report noted with justification that “we are now living amongst those who were our enemies a few months ago, almost all the wealthy and influential people are fascists, a decree by the Badoglio Government wiping out fascism does not necessarily change the average individual’s political views, civilians cannot be trusted.”²⁶⁷ Although many Ortonesi had welcomed the Canadians as liberators, others had not; by 9 January 1944, reports had already circulated of Italian betrayals against Canadians. One such incident occurred when two Italians had crossed the lines and told the Germans everything they knew about the Canadians’ dispositions just north of Ortona at Point 59. The following day the area received five direct hits. Captured Germans prisoners reported during interrogation that Italians had provided information regarding the location of Canadian positions north of the town. The Germans themselves stated that “they had no need to patrol as they have complete knowledge of our positions.”²⁶⁸

The civilian control strategy was based on restricted mobility. Upon liberation, the majority of the 1st Canadian Provost Company was stationed in the hamlets south of Ortona or along the main roads. The initial priority for the military police was “to ensure the easy

²⁶⁶ AMGOT Allied Military Government Occupied Territories Posters, 1-2, 204A1.009(D2), DHH.

²⁶⁷ Seaforth Highlanders War Diaries 1943/06-1944, 22 February 1944, LAC.

²⁶⁸ Security Instructions “Italian Civilians” 1 Cdn Inf Div, 9 January 1944, 234C1.026 (D1), DHH.

flow of all operational traffic,”²⁶⁹ as the supplies and reinforcements provided the Canadians the opportunity to support and hold their position in Ortona. The majority of Italian roads were in poor condition, and directing traffic in a controlled manner was the only way to guarantee supply routes stayed open. Initial security enforcement fell to the soldiers stationed in the town.²⁷⁰ By 8 January 1944, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment reported undertaking piquet duty from 1730 hrs to 0700 hrs every day. The infantrymen on piquet had to enforce a 1900 hr curfew for civilians and to question and apprehend any Italians found outside after curfew without a pass providing them permission to do so.²⁷¹ Corporal Bill Teleske recalled that when he was on piquet, Canadian guards would ask the Italians ‘what are you doing in town’ or ‘what business’ they had wandering around. Although there were some language barriers during these confrontations, “we picked up enough Italian to get by.”²⁷² The soldiers’ duties also extended to daytime monitoring of Italians as they entered the town and to protect civilian industry.²⁷³ To deter Italian spying and espionage, an army edict was enacted removing all civilians inhabiting areas near the front lines.²⁷⁴ By 20 January all civilians in the forward areas were evacuated.²⁷⁵

The only manner in which an Italian could travel to restricted areas without being arrested or interrogated was with a civilian pass providing him permission to do so. The pass displayed on the follow page was provided to an Italian named Pietro by the 48th

²⁶⁹ Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces In Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Pt V, 14,15,16,17,18,19& 20, Annex 1, 1, DHH.

²⁷⁰ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

²⁷¹ Loyal Edmonton Regiment, War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 8 January 1944, LAC.

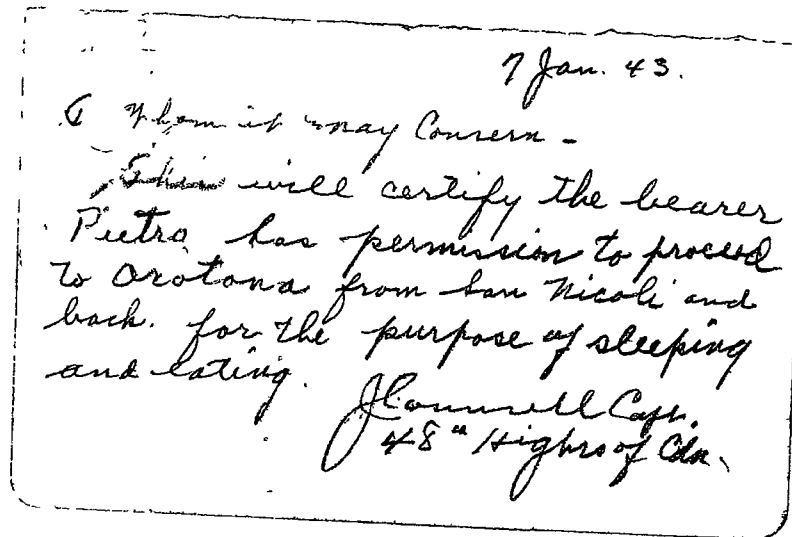
²⁷² Bill Teleske interview with author, 14 March 2010.

²⁷³ Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs and Military Government, 3, Canadian Military Headquarters Historical Officers Report, 140 (Copy 2), DHH.

²⁷⁴ Seaforth Highlanders War Diaries 1943/06-1944, 22 January 1944, LAC.

²⁷⁵ Farley Mowat, *The Regiment*, 290-291.

Highlanders of Canada. In January 1944, Pietro was allowed to travel between the towns of San Nicola and Ortona for the purpose of “sleeping and eating.”²⁷⁶



15: Allied-issued civilian pass. 234C1.023 (D7), DHH.

Other passes were provided to Italians for more pressing reasons. Giuseppe Granzini's father, a foreman in a brick factory south of the town, was given a pass allowing him to travel every day to the factory to verify its condition.²⁷⁷ Also, such passes permitted Italians to visit family, protect their property, and travel to different regions for commercial purposes. In the case of Signore Granzini, his daily inspection of the brick factory also served to protect the plant for potential use by the Allies. Passes provided Italians with a mobility that respected their lifestyles and their obligations. Given their tactical priorities, the Germans had encountered problems regarding the mobility of the Ortonesi.²⁷⁸ Although the Canadians probably had similar insecurities relating to the Italians' mobility in a forward

²⁷⁶ 1 CDN FD Security Section Int Report No.19 22 Jan 44, No.20, 29 Jan 1944, Copy No 2, 2, 234C1.023 (D7), DHH. The date of the pass is incorrect. Considering it had only been 1944 for seven days, the officer who issued the pass must have made an error, as the Canadians were neither in San Pietro or Ortona in January of 1943.

²⁷⁷ Giuseppe Graziani interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

²⁷⁸ Please refer to Chapter 1 for reference to German problems associated with the Ortonesi's mobility.

area, these passes represented a compromise and a proactive approach to trusting Italians. This in turn helped develop positive relations between the two groups.

Still there were occupational problems with civilian passes. While often issued for inauspicious reasons, the security risks associated with the disappearance of passes were so great that all regiments were promptly notified if one had gone missing.²⁷⁹ Other problems included “the issuing of passes by unauthorized personnel.” One example was when an Italian, Tommaso Marino, was provided with an unauthorized pass by one Private Cuckney.²⁸⁰ Soldiers and Officers were not permitted to issue passes, unless the Town Major, Civil Affairs Officer or AMG officials provided them with permission to do so.²⁸¹ Even Italian partisans who worked for Allied units were subject to normal restrictions applicable to civilian movement when off duty.²⁸²

In the eyes of some Canadian officials, these precautions were warranted. Throughout January and February, Allied regiments reported encounters in which “Italian civilians had been found roaming around.”²⁸³ Although they “looked harmless enough,” procedure dictated that “Italians found without a pass were to be sent to Brigade Headquarters and then transported to Ortona for interrogation.”²⁸⁴ Many Italians who were apprehended had crossed the lines from German-occupied areas. As a result of the fine weather conditions a large number of civilians were reported to have arrived by sea between 3-9 February 1944.²⁸⁵ Many of the refugees who crossed the lines did so to escape the Germans’ oppression. On 22 January 1944, refugees from Tollo crossed the lines because “the

²⁷⁹ 4 Cdn Fd Pk Bqn RCE & 5 Cdn Armd Div Br Tp RCE Active Service Force War Diary, 15 March 1944, RG-24-C-3, T-18733, Volume: 14792, LAC.

²⁸⁰ 1 CDN FD Security Section Int Report No.19 22 Jan 44, No.20, 29 Jan 1944, Copy No 2, 3, DHH.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 6.

²⁸² 1st Cdn Inf Div Instrs & Reports re Partisans & Civilians, 10, 145.206009 (D7), DHH.

²⁸³ Seaforth Highlanders of Canada War Diaries 1943/06-1944, 17 February 1944, LAC.

²⁸⁴ Loyal Edmonton Regiment War Diaries 1943/09-1944/06, 17 February 1944, LAC.

²⁸⁵ Allied Military Government – Civil Affairs – Reports, 9 February 1944, 1, 224C1.053 (D8), DHH.

Germans were taking women and children away and forcing the men into labour gangs.”²⁸⁶ If it was determined the refugees were not spies, officials from the Allied Military Government and soldiers from the field security section would provide lodging and food until transport could be provided to a refugee camp.²⁸⁷ The Germans followed a somewhat different approach to dealing with Italians who crossed into their lines: any civilian trying to cross into their lines was to be fired on.²⁸⁸

Although many refugees had crossed the lines for their own safety, some Italians migrated to perform missions for the Germans. Warnings outlined in regimental war diaries reported that “young ardent fascists are being employed by the Germans to gather scraps of information and perform espionage.”²⁸⁹ However, the Ortonesi played an active role in reporting to Canadians on Italians who were suspected of working for the enemy. On 15 February 1944, a Sicilian was reported by civilians to be near Ortona and was likely to attempt espionage.²⁹⁰ On another occasion, an Italian named Nicole Di Silvio had been reported to the authorities by informants who had become suspicious of Di Silvio because he was asking about troop locations and movements in their area.²⁹¹ Such services facilitated the development of trust and good relations between the Canadians and Ortonesi during January and February, as was reported by the 1st Canadian Field Security Section Intelligence reports for both months.²⁹²

²⁸⁶ 1 CDN FD Security Section Int Report No.19 22 Jan 44, No.20, 29 Jan 1944, Copy No 2, 2, DHH.

²⁸⁷ Allied Military Government – Civil Affairs – Reports, 9 February 1944, 1, DHH.

²⁸⁸ Canadian Military Headquarters, Historical Records Operations CDN Forces A.A.I, 123, RG 24, Volume 12944, LAC.

²⁸⁹ 5 CDN 17 RRMD Regt (8NBG), VIII Princess Louise’s New Brunswick Hussars Active Service Force War Diary 01 Feb 44 to 29 Feb 44, 18 February 1944, RG-24-C-3, T-18733, Volume: 14792, LAC.

²⁹⁰ 12 Canadian Armoured Regiment (T.R.R.), Active Service Force War Diaries 1 Feb 44 to 29 Feb 44, 15 February 1944, RG-24-C-3, Volume: 18206, LAC.

²⁹¹ 1 CDN FD Security Section Int Report No.19 22 Jan 44, No.20, 29 Jan 1944, Copy No 3, 2, DHH.

²⁹² Ibid, 4.

Italians arrested and charged with spying for the Germans or disobeying any of the laws outlined by the military government were brought before Allied Military Courts.²⁹³ After liberation, Lanfranco Berardi's parents were accused by other Italians of crossing the lines to spy for the Germans. Although taken to court, the accusations against the Berardis were false and Canadian soldiers who knew the family provided alibis.²⁹⁴ Such scenarios were not uncommon. There were no reliable methods for locating collaborators, which resulted in unsubstantiated accusations between Ortonesi as a consequence of personal grudges and vendettas between locals. Berardi has never forgotten the honesty of the Canadian soldiers during his parents' trial and attributes the latter's safe return home to the Canadians.²⁹⁵

The majority of Italians arrested in Ortona were arrested for possession of army property, contraband, or grain from black market sources.²⁹⁶ The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry's war diary noted that when army property was found on civilians, most had claimed it was given to them as a gift or for a service rendered. The order issued to all Canadian soldiers in Italy explicitly stated that soldiers were not allowed to barter or give army property to civilians.²⁹⁷ Not all army possessions were acquired through bartering. Many dead soldiers lay in the streets after the battle. Corporal Maurice White remembered stopping an Italian as he was in the process of taking boots from a dead German soldier on 29 December. For Corporal White respect even of the enemy dead was very important.²⁹⁸

²⁹³ *Civil Affairs Handbook ITALY, Section 2, Supplement Allied Military Government Manual of the World War*, 127.

²⁹⁴ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ No. 1 CDN L of C Provost Company, Including Nos 1, 2, 3, and 4 L of C Sections War Diary 01 – 29 Feb 44, 13 February 1944, LAC.

²⁹⁷ Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry War Diary, Lieut-Col. C.B Ware. D.S.O., Commanding Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Order Issue No 9, 23 February 1944, LAC.

²⁹⁸ Maurice White interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

Minor confrontations with Canadian soldiers also led to the arrest of some Italians. Soldiers that became intoxicated on leave usually found themselves in trouble later. On 7 January, a drunk Private Aymong tried to forcibly enter a local household. The Italian inhabitants chased him down and beat him with a blunt object. Eight Italians were arrested as a result of this incident.²⁹⁹ On another occasion, two soldiers of the Perth Regiment were shot and wounded by an Italian farmer outside of Ortona when he caught them stealing eggs. The farmer was taken into custody both for his actions and for his own protection.³⁰⁰ In both cases the Italians arrested were provoked into forms of violence. Perhaps the Italians did not understand the rights they held and felt that violence as self defence was the only manner to deal with such encounters. Francesca LaSorda remembered an incident when a drunken Canadian soldier knocked on her family's door asking for wine. On that particular night the LaSorda family was hosting a Canadian Army Sergeant whom they had befriended. The Sergeant opened the door and gave the drunken soldier an earful for his behavior.³⁰¹ Many Canadians knew they were representing their country and would always try to leave a positive impression with the Italian civilians that they encountered.³⁰²

Italians who had served in the Italian military and had made their way home were also deemed a security risk in a liberated area. Large numbers of Italian prisoners of war were already being used by the Allies in Italy thanks to labour shortages.³⁰³ With Italy's declaration of war against Germany, many of these transient military personnel were

²⁹⁹ No.7 Cdn Light Field Ambulance Active Service Force War Diaries 1 to 31 Jan 44, 7 January 1944, RG-24-C-3, Volume: 15859, LAC.

³⁰⁰ Scoslawski, *Not All of Us Were Brave*, 105.

³⁰¹ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

³⁰² Jack Shepherd, *A March to Fear "Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment"* (Medicine Hat: Holmes Printing, 2003), 33.

³⁰³ Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces In Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Pt V, Employment of Italian Co-operators and Handling of Enemy and Surrendered Enemy Personnel After the General Surrender, 1, DHH.

rounded up by the Allies to be disposed of through Italian military channels. This was the case for one Ortonese, Nicole di Silvie Mazzoccolie. Stationed in France at the time of Italy's surrender, he had found his way back to Ortona on 16 September 1943. Because Mazzoccolie had not been officially released from duty by the new Italian government, upon the liberation of the town he was taken into custody and then transferred to the control of the Italian military.³⁰⁴ No record exists as to whether Mazzoccolie and others like him were willing to rejoin the Italian military. It is likely that many did not considering that the majority had travelled great distance to get back home. But to maintain amicable relations with their new Italian allies, the Canadians had to follow through on apprehending Italian soldiers who had not obtained a proper discharge.

The control of the political situation in Ortona was also of great importance to security units, Civil Affairs Officers, and the AMG. The Allied Military Government's political mandate was not to support any specific democratic movements in Italy, but to control political unrest.³⁰⁵ The Canadian Civil Affairs Officer was to do the same, as he was not authorized to direct policy or discuss political developments with Italians.³⁰⁶ Once the AMG was established, top Italian officials who had held office under the fascist regime were removed.³⁰⁷ However, not all affiliated with Benito Mussolini could be removed as they sometimes were the only people who had been trained in civil administration over the

³⁰⁴ 1 CDN FD Security Section Int Report No.19 22 Jan 44, No.20, 29 Jan 1944 , Copy No 2, 7, DHH.

³⁰⁵ *A Review of Allied Military Government and of the Allied Commission in Italy, July 10, 1943 to May 2 1945*, 84.

³⁰⁶ *Civil Affairs Handbook ITALY, Section 2, Supplement Allied Military Government Manual of the World War*, 80-81.

³⁰⁷ *A Review of Allied Military Government and of the Allied Commission in Italy, July 10, 1943 to May 2 1945*, 84.

previous twenty years.³⁰⁸ If former fascist officials were employed, they had to be willing to serve under AMG instructions and guidelines,³⁰⁹ the lesser of two evils since the Canadians had to re-establish local administration. To encourage the development of democracy and to further weaken fascist elements still existing in liberated areas, on 6 January 1944, the Italian people were given some liberty to participate in non-fascist political activities by the AMG.³¹⁰ Later that month, some Italians formally requested AMG officials to form an anti-fascist political party with a liberal constitution in the Ortona area.³¹¹ Some also went out of their way to denounce known fascists. One civilian Enrico Cavuto, went so far as to report the activities of his own cousin Domenico who was a fascist propagandist. Others, such as Vitantonio Di Fabio of Ortona, had been reported by his peers for continuing fascist activity after the signing of the armistice.³¹² As one of the AMG's main objectives was to eliminate fascism, the reporting of active fascists further promoted democracy in Ortona by displaying to the Canadians the Italians' willingness to change and cooperate with them.³¹³

But the Italians were not the only ones that needed to be controlled. The Canadians themselves presented other challenges. Corporal Bill Teleske recalled that drunkenness among soldiers on leave left bad impressions on the civilian population. Other times "some guys just went AWOL."³¹⁴ The soldiers were provided with a 2100 hour curfew, which gave

³⁰⁸ Lt-Col. P.G. Griffin, Commanding 2nd Canadian Armoured Regiment (LdSH) (RC), Regimental Orders Part One, Last Order No. 16, d/22 Feb 44, This Order No. 17, Headquarters, 1st Canadian Infantry Division, Corps of Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineer, 1, RG-24-C-3, and Volume 16188, LAC.

³⁰⁹ Harris, 173.

³¹⁰ Telegram – London – January 6, 1944, From: The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs To: The Secretary of State for External Affairs Canada, W.L. Mackenzie King Papers, 1944, Correspondence, Primary Series, Mr. Roche, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, M.G. 26, Volume 370, Page 321724.

³¹¹ 1 CDN FD Security Section Int Report No.19 22 Jan 44, No.20, 29 Jan 1944 ,Copy No 3, 1, DHH.

³¹² Ibid, 5.

³¹³ Harris, 173.

³¹⁴ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

them plenty of time to get into mischief.³¹⁵ Many of the Canadians gave the name “Liquid Sunshine” to the abundance of wine in Abruzzo. Canadian officers, understanding alcohol’s effect on soldiers, tried to destroy it before their men got a hold of it. Major Jim Stone recalled that “when I could see barrels of wine I shot holes in them.”³¹⁶ A ten year old at the time Tommaso Cespa witnessed the destruction of wine by Canadian soldiers but did not understand why the wine barrels were being destroyed.³¹⁷ Alcohol often led to violence between soldiers and civilians. A number of Canadian infantrymen were convicted and sentenced to up to a year of hard labour for offences against Italians. During the New Westminster Regiment’s forty-eight-hour leave in Ortona from 13-14 January, charges were laid against two soldiers. On 13 January 1944 Corporal Robert Davidson Brown was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment for assaulting an Italian civilian. The next day Private George Ivan Gracey was sentenced to one year’s hard labour for fighting with Italian locals.³¹⁸ In both cases surviving documentary evidence provided no information as to why the incidents had occurred. The drinking of too much wine can be assumed to be the most probable reason for these acts, as one regimental headquarters special order notes that “many cases were being reported of soldiers overindulging in the native wine known as *vino*, resulting in soldiers committing crimes and other offences.” As a consequence some Canadians were being sent to Africa to perform hard labour as punishment.³¹⁹

Ortona’s 15th-century Aragonese castle, which was used by the Germans during the battle as their headquarters, was transformed into the 1st Canadian Division’s detention

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Dancocks, 218.

³¹⁷ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

³¹⁸ 4 Cdn Fd Pk Sqn RCE & 5 Cdn Armd Div Br Tp RCE War Diary, 14-15 January 1944, LAC.

³¹⁹ Regimental Headquarters Special Order, Seaforth Highlanders War Diaries 1943/06-1944, 18 December 1943, LAC.

camp. During this time, the castle, located in the north end of the town, regularly received German shell fire. This made it a very uncomfortable quarters for the soldiers detained there. Once per week, the incarcerated men were marched along the streets of Ortona to perform work such as carrying sandbags from the beach back to the castle or to visit the mobile bath.³²⁰ “I still remember the faces of shame they had and how they did not want to look us in the eye,” stated Francesca LaSorda.³²¹ Other duties for arrested soldiers included the cleaning of areas around regimental headquarters and helping carry wounded men to the field hospital.³²² These forms of public punishment sent a clear message to the Ortonesi that the Canadians were not above the law. This also fostered trust among Italians for the Canadian security and policing units, whose job was enforcing order in the town.

Feeding and employing the Ortonesi

Unemployment and hunger were two bleak realities of the war which could easily have given rise to social unrest and, consequently, threaten the security of the region.³²³ Initially, the Ortonesi had access to certain foodstuffs. The town council had stored dried pasta for the inhabitants before the battle.³²⁴ Some had even hidden grain and salami in their attics.³²⁵ But even with these meagre supplies, the majority did not have enough food for themselves for any sustained period and some had no food at all.³²⁶ As a consequence, large numbers of hungry Ortonesi migrated to the countryside and hamlets to the south in search of

³²⁰ Strome Galloway, *A Regiment at War*, 130.

³²¹ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

³²² Cameron, 94.

³²³ *A Review of Allied Military Government and of the Allied Commission in Italy, July 10, 1943 to May 2 1945*, 52.

³²⁴ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

³²⁵ Di Tullio, 96.

³²⁶ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

provisions. The responsibility for feeding the Italians fell to the AMG. This required the procurement of the necessary supplies to provide the Italians with a consistent diet. Unlike the Sicilian Campaign, a number of towns on the Italian mainland had been badly damaged during the fighting, with Ortona being one of the worst. These damaged towns constituted their own sets of challenges to the AMG. For example, many urban areas that had witnessed combat operations had suffered damaged power installations either from the fighting or by the actions of the retreating Germans, thus forcing AMG to establish forward supply depots where commodities like white flour could be imported and stored.³²⁷

There was also the threat that the availability of food would decrease because of the destruction that followed combat operations. This had the potential to stir unrest amongst the Italian population and cause a negative image of the allies.³²⁸ To combat these problems, the AMG began importing large quantities of various supplies. By 30 April 1944 the AMG “had imported over 1,496,000 tons of supplies consisting of wheat, flour, barley, meats, fish, cheese, milk, dried vegetables, beans, sugar, oil and fats and powdered eggs to feed the people of Italy.” In a weekly report from February 1944, the AMG noted fresh vegetables being transported to Ortona for civilians,³²⁹ included were other supplies that originated from Canada and the United States.³³⁰ AMGOT records noted that for a town of ten thousand inhabitants, sixty-seven metric tons of grain would be supplied, which could last for two weeks.³³¹ The Germans had also felt the burden of sustaining supplies for the Italians in the areas that they occupied. In 1944 German-occupied Italy the bread ration was 100

³²⁷ Harris, 155 and 157.

³²⁸ Ibid, 170.

³²⁹ *Civil Affairs-Allied Military Government- Reports 10-16 February 1944*, 1, DHH.

³³⁰ *A Review of Allied Military Government and of the Allied Commission in Italy, July 10, 1943 to May 2 1945*, 93.

³³¹ Ibid, 93.

grams of bread per head per day, with special allowances for larger families. In comparison the AMG provided a ration of 150 grams per head per day in order to further promote the Allied presence in a liberated area.³³² The photograph below shows Italians waiting in line for grain rations at an Allied Military Government storehouse in Ortona on 13 January 1944.³³³ The number of Ortonesi waiting in line for their bread ration clearly shows that many were extremely dependent on the supplies provided by the AMG, and that if supplies had not been provided there might have been social unrest within the town. With the Canadians occupying the area during this period it was to their benefit, just as much as it was that of the Ortonesi for supplies to continue to make their way in.



16: Ortonesi waiting in line at an AMGOT grain store in Ortona, 112.3P1 (D1124), DHH.

The supplies provided by the AMG were only meant to sustain a population until it could produce enough food to become self-sufficient. In an effort to bring economic

³³² Harris, 157 and 167

³³³ DPR photos of AMGOT activities in Italy – 1944, 13 January 1944, 112.3P1 (D1124), DHH.

normalcy to Ortona, the AMG prevented Canadian soldiers from purchasing local produce. Canadians were restricted from purchasing any livestock, eggs, fish, and poultry up until February 1944. By restricting soldiers from purchasing or taking civilian supplies, the AMG concluded that the importing of provisions for the Italian population would decrease and permit an increase in the tonnage of war materials imported. Soldiers were only permitted to acquire restricted foodstuffs if a surplus above civilian needs was made available.³³⁴ Steps were also taken to protect the areas from which Italians harvested food. Since one of the main sources of food for the Ortonesi derived from the Adriatic Sea, the Town Major sent out a declaration to all units stationed in Ortona and the surrounding area stating that soldiers could not use dynamite in fishing areas because it spoiled the fishing grounds.³³⁵ It is questionable whether this declaration was followed, as Robert Thexton of the West Nova Scotia Regiment recalled that one day he saw some men from his regiment just outside of the port of Ortona fishing with grenades. When Thexton asked what the men were doing, another soldier replied “catching the CO’s supper.”³³⁶ To protect farm produce, the Canadians were warned not to mutilate olive trees and other orchard trees. Such actions were viewed as acts of vandalism.³³⁷ Overall, these measures provided locals with the ability to survive in the short term and become self-sufficient in the long term.

³³⁴ 4 Cdn Fd Pk Sqn RCE War Diary, Part One Orders 45, By Major G.E. Smith RCE, 8 February 1944, LAC.

³³⁵ Major W.D. Banks, Communications from Town Major of Ortona, 5th Field Ambulance, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps War Diary 1943/01-1944/0, 4 February 1944, LAC.

³³⁶ Robert Thexton, *Times I Remember: Some Recollections of Four and a Half Years Services with the West Nova Scotia Regiment during 1940-1944* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 2009), 49.

³³⁷ 4 Cdn Fd Pk Sqn RCE War Diary, Part One Orders 75, By Major G.E. Smith RCE, 26 March 1944, LAC.

Ortona's destruction paralyzed the industries, small businesses, and farms that supported the economy, leaving many Italians without any means of acquiring an income. The potential threat that unemployed Italians presented was evident in the fact that the Germans had begun paying Italians to perform espionage.³³⁸ The town's physical condition was the key to solving the Italian employment problem. The photograph to the bottom right shows the condition of the streets of Ortona upon liberation.³³⁹ The roads were blocked with rubble. Trucks and cars could not move into the interior of the town and civilian and soldier alike found it difficult to navigate the streets.

The town could only function as a leave centre once all the rubble was removed. The majority of soldiers stationed in Ortona were either being reorganized, on leave, or undertaking administrative or auxiliary duties.³⁴⁰ This did not leave many men available to physically remove the rubble and clean up. The Royal Canadian Engineers began to use bulldozers, but more manpower was needed as Ortona lacked any intact machinery of its own to help with the removal.³⁴¹ Corporal Maurice



17: Soldiers and civilians navigating the rubble in Ortona. *The Battle of Ortona "I Parchi Della Memoria"*.

White, a farmer before the war, recalled never seeing one civilian tractor in Italy and noted

³³⁸ 5 CDN 17 RRMD Regt (8NBG), VIII Princess Louise's New Brunswick Hussars War Diary 01 Feb 44 to 29 Feb 44, 18 February 1944, LAC.

³³⁹ Buonamano, Tavano, and Vanni, 131.

³⁴⁰ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

³⁴¹ Roy, 278.

that every village was way behind the times. “The further south you went the further back in time you went.”³⁴² Local reconstruction would offer citizens living wages and raise their quality of life for civilians and soldiers alike. It would also allow the Ortonesi to pull their own weight in the reconstruction process and thus be identified as valid contributors to Ortona’s rebirth.

Italian labour was also in demand in other fields. The Town Major of Ortona needed plumbers, tile setters, and bricklayers to perform work on billets and to serve other purposes for the regiments under his control.³⁴³ The concept of hiring Italians was not new to the 1st Canadian Infantry Division as it had employed them to perform a number of tasks throughout the campaign. One example was



18: Allied Lira. Author’s personal collection.

Domenico Caruso, who had been employed to provide written and oral translation services since December 1943.³⁴⁴ Immediately upon liberation, AMG authorities introduced Allied Military Lira as the legal tender in the area.³⁴⁵ The photo shows a Cinque Allied Lira bill.³⁴⁶ Known to some soldiers as “victory money” the currency replaced the former legal tender.³⁴⁷

³⁴² Maurice White interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

³⁴³ Labour 9/13/1943-3/9/1945, 23, DHH.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 1.

³⁴⁵ AMGOT Allied Military Government Occupied Territories Posters, 1-2, DHH.

³⁴⁶ Author’s personal collection.

³⁴⁷ Rudy Deutsch interview with author, 25 January 2010.

It was the task of the Civil Affairs Officer to safeguard the currency by finding a functioning safe and stationing an armed guard. This meant occupying Ortona's Bank of Naples, which contained the only remaining intact safe in town.³⁴⁸ The war diary of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada reported that by 30 December 1943 "labour was being recruited from the civilian population for the purpose of cleaning up the town."³⁴⁹ Every morning, the people of Ortona who were in need of work would gather at the town square to receive papers on the location and type of work they would perform for the day. In some cases the Italians were provided with spades, shovels, ladders, axes, and other tools by the Canadian Army.³⁵⁰

Ortona's Town Council was an active participant in the employment process. Tommaso Carceni, who became the bookkeeper for the town's finances, remembers meeting with Civil Affairs officers and Allied Military Government officials on numerous occasions to review the receipts being paid to Italian labourers and to help organize the payment system.³⁵¹ For jobs that needed a specific form of skilled labour, the Town Major would send a request to the municipality for assistance in finding Italians to perform the work needed.³⁵² Those employed by auxiliary services, such as the clubs, hostels, messes, or barber shops that were eventually established in Ortona were not paid from the funds provided by AMG. These facilities would charge soldiers for the services offered and in turn would pay the Italians employed from the revenues collected.³⁵³ A large number of Ortonesi became successful

³⁴⁸ *Civil Affairs Handbook ITALY, Section 2, Supplement Allied Military Government Manual of the World War*, 91: Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

³⁴⁹ Seaforth Highlanders of Canada War Diaries 1943/06-1944, 30 December 1943, LAC.

³⁵⁰ Tommaso Rosario Grilli, *Relazione Del Comune Di Ortona Per La Richiesta Di Concessione Della Medaglia D'Oro Al Valor Civile*, (Ortona, 1948), 208.

³⁵¹ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

³⁵² Labour 9/13/1943-3/9/1945, 23, DHH.

³⁵³ *Ibid*, 24.

entrepreneurs upon the liberation of Ortona through the development of an informal economy and the provision of services that were in demand by soldiers.

Some of the earliest projects that Ortonesi were employed for were the clearing of roads, the digging of ditches, the repairing of bridges along the Moro River, and removing rubble from the city centre. Soldiers and civilians also participated in recovering, transporting, and burying the bodies of those found under the rubble.³⁵⁴ Other Italians were hired by medical units to wash bandages for stretcher bearers.³⁵⁵ By 12 February 1944, two hundred Italians were employed on road work outside of Ortona and an additional one hundred and fifty had been hired to clear rubble.³⁵⁶

On paper, unskilled labourers were paid between ninety and one hundred and twenty lira per day for their work.³⁵⁷ But these standards were not always enforced. Tommaso Cespa, one of the Italians hired to clear rubble in Ortona, stated that “Some men were paid extra lira because they provided a donkey or cart to remove rubble.”³⁵⁸ Others, like the Berardi family, had no need for employment assistance by the Canadians as they were preoccupied with rebuilding their farm.³⁵⁹ The work completed by civilians in clearing the rubble and repairing roads and bridges benefited Italians and Canadians alike by providing them with more mobility, the ability to transfer supplies to the interior of the town, and the opportunity to focus on the rebuilding of houses, stores, and town infrastructure.

The approaches undertaken to establish Ortona as a habitable place by the Allied Military Government, Civil Affairs Officer, and Town Major conformed to the needs of the

³⁵⁴ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

³⁵⁵ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

³⁵⁶ 4 Cdn Fd Pk Sqn RCE & 5 Cdn Armd Div Br Tp RCE War Diary, 10-12 February 1944, LAC

³⁵⁷ Labour 9/13/1943-3/9/1945, Appendix E, DHH.

³⁵⁸ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

³⁵⁹ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

Canadian soldiers. To meet their needs a stable environment had to be created for the civilian population. Although Ortonesi had to surrender some of their personal rights, the benefits far outweighed the negative repercussions. The people in Ortona were provided with food, employment opportunities, medical assistance, security, and services that made Ortona a safer place to live. The civil development process in Ortona opened new channels for interactions between Italians and Canadians, notably through the communal living billets offered, the charity of the Canadian soldiers, and the numerous formal and informal employment opportunities that the Canadians provided while on leave. These informal engagements built better relations between the Ortonesi and Canadians and continued to develop the Italians' positive impressions of the latter.

Chapter 3

The Development of an Informal Economy... and Friendship

“We would regularly visit the Canadian mess by the cathedral to get leftovers after the soldiers had eaten. On one occasion there were so many children waiting for food that once the cook finally got to us he made a sign with his hands saying no food left. Then he told us to wait a minute. He went back into the kitchen cut a few pieces of bread, dipped it in the gravy that was left over from the meat and gave it to me and my friend. How can you forget something like that.”³⁶⁰

Once Ortona was liberated and the process of rebuilding and re-establishing the population was well under way, informal interactions between Canadian soldiers and Ortonesi increased dramatically. This was the direct result of the provision of forty-eight hour leave passes, which provided soldiers opportunities to relax amidst the civilian population.³⁶¹ The consequence was the development and reinforcement of genuine friendships between Canadian soldiers and Italian civilians. These relationships solidified both groups’ positive impressions of each other and became the foundation for the positive collective memories that exist to this day. As such, this chapter explores the informal engagements between the Canadians and Ortonesi which revolved around food and wine, living arrangements, leisure activities, religion, informal employment opportunities provided by Canadian soldiers on leave, and the acts of bartering and selling. Since the majority of these interactions occurred sporadically between small groups of soldiers and civilians and were usually of a private and personal nature, few official sources, regimental histories, or popular histories about the Canadians’ role in Ortona offer any insight into these interactions. The activities of the soldiers on leave were of little importance to contemporary observers unless such interactions exerted an impact on their operational abilities, security,

³⁶⁰ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

³⁶¹ Raddall, 179.

intelligence, or civil control. Certain forms of employment opportunities and other forms of relationships are mentioned in Canadian intelligence and security reports. Even so, the approach used in this chapter to illustrate the informal economy and friendships that were formed derives heavily from oral testimonies, soldiers' memoirs, newspaper articles from the 1st Canadian Infantry Division newspaper the *Red Patch*, and the photographic evidence provided in the photo albums of the regiments that rotated through Ortona. The photographs' provided in the regimental photo albums contain some of the strongest evidence of how Canadian soldiers and Ortonesi interacted informally in and around Ortona as the majority of photos were taken during periods of rest and leisure. The articles in the *Red Patch* highlight the activities soldiers had within Ortona while on leave and offer a unique insight to the Canadians presence.

The Role of Food

The Allied Military Government and the town council of Ortona had provided the people with a balanced diet that would last until self-sufficiency could be achieved. Nonetheless, a demand grew amongst the Ortonesi for various scarce foodstuffs.³⁶² Meat had become a very rare commodity within the town for Italians and it was not uncommon to see Italians cutting up dead animals that had been killed from German shelling.³⁶³ Following their liberation, the people of Ortona almost immediately remarked that the Canadian soldiers had a number of edible goods to offer.³⁶⁴ Indeed, every soldier was supplied with chocolates, bully beef, and biscuits.³⁶⁵ Some Ortonesi, such as Tommaso Cespa and Emilia

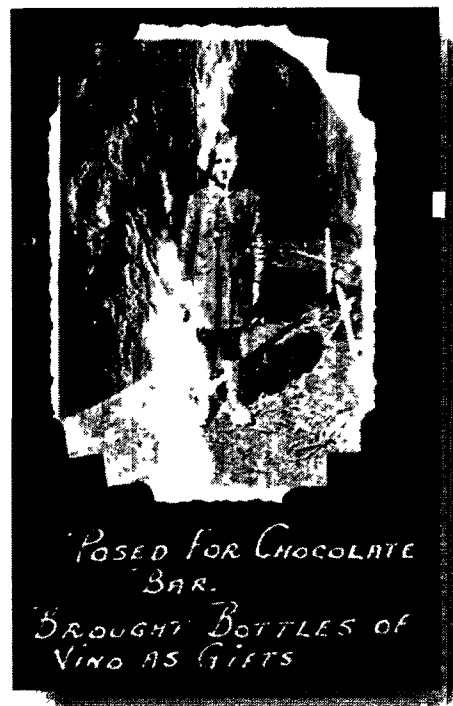
³⁶² Emila Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

³⁶³ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

³⁶⁴ Nicola Paolini interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

³⁶⁵ Cameron, 98.

Polidoro, benefited from Canadian Army mess halls that provided them with leftovers.³⁶⁶ Individually, the Canadian soldiers became well known for the candy that they would generously give to Ortonesi children. “When I went to visit my father at work Canadian soldiers would give sweets and chocolates to me and my friends,” stated Franco D’Adamo.³⁶⁷ For those who were children during the war, such as Giuseppe Graziani, the chocolates given to him were the first he had ever had, as the war had made such commodities non-existent before the arrival of the Allies.³⁶⁸ Bill Teleske recalled giving chocolates to children and cigarettes to their parents on a number of occasions.³⁶⁹ The Canadian soldiers were provided with a weekly cigarette and chocolate ration, which they used at their own discretion.³⁷⁰ Some Italian children became accustomed to getting chocolates from the Canadians. The photo above is of an Ortonese girl who “posed for [a] chocolate bar.”³⁷¹



19: Ortonese girl posing for chocolates. Box 90, 20050205-029, CWM.

Other food commodities included canned meats, vegetables, gum, and white bread.

Needless to say, the Canadians' generosity greatly improved their image amongst the

³⁶⁶ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009; Emila Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

³⁶⁷ Franco D’Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009.

³⁶⁸ Giuseppe Graziani interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

³⁶⁹ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

³⁷⁰ Seaforth Highlanders of Canada War Diaries 1943/06-1944, 4 January 1944, LAC.

³⁷¹ Douglas Andrew Harvie, *Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps photograph Album*, Box 90, 20050205-029, CWM.

townspeople.³⁷² Nicola Paolini remembers that “some British soldiers would just take things without giving anything in return.” By comparison, “the Canadians were always generous to us.”³⁷³ Upon the Canadians’ deployment to the Liri Valley, Indian soldiers took their place in Ortona.³⁷⁴ Giuseppe Graziani recalled that “we saw a real difference between the Canadians and Indians. The Indians would give us a pancake bread to eat, but after having all the treats from the Canadians I only ate it to be polite.”³⁷⁵ Above all, the Canadians were remembered for their generous nature in the post-liberation period. During the combat operations from 5 to 28 December 1943, many Italians could not identify the liberating soldiers nationality.³⁷⁶ Throughout December 1943 many Canadians tried their best to promote their identity to the local population.³⁷⁷ Once the Italians knew the men were Canadian, different attributes began to be affiliated with the Canadian soldiers as a result of their actions. The development of typical Canadian characteristics and the generous giving of needed supplies promoted the Canadians’ image as generous liberators amongst the Italians, to the point that they were favored by the people of Ortona in comparison to other Commonwealth soldiers. The oral testimony of surviving Ortonesi has provided solid evidence of this.

Since the British compositions provided to Canadians were defined by some soldiers as “muck and vomit,”³⁷⁸ the Canadian regiments that boasted good meals lived somewhat off the land.³⁷⁹ Although the town of Ortona had very little in terms of foodstuffs,

³⁷² Giuseppe Graziani interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

³⁷³ Nicola Paolini interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

³⁷⁴ Raddall, 184.

³⁷⁵ Giuseppe Graziani interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009.

³⁷⁶ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

³⁷⁷ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

³⁷⁸ Cameron, 98.

³⁷⁹ Bernier and Allard, 70.

some of the Ortonesi farmers in the countryside still boasted chickens and other livestock.³⁸⁰ Soldiers continued to benefit from any sources of livestock found within the Italian countryside. The photo below shows Canadian soldiers of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade on 2 April 1944 with three lambs that were “found in no-man’s land north of Ortona” and had been adopted by the Canadian unit.³⁸¹ No records were found of Canadians being restricted from acquiring foodstuffs from Italians after February 1944.³⁸² As such, the lambs were probably requisitioned during a time when the region had become self-sufficient. The surviving livestock on Italian farms became very important to Canadian soldiers as they endeavored to find whatever they could to produce a good meal. The lambs’ fate is unrecorded.



20: Unidentified Canadian soldiers with lambs.
112.3P1 (D1096), DHH.

The Canadians also benefited from the Italians’ cooking abilities as many Canadians believed that Italian food was superior to what was offered in the army kitchens.³⁸³ To benefit from the local fare, Canadian soldiers would bring rations to Ortonesi households in exchange for fresh home-cooked meals. Bill Teleske recalled that “the Italian ladies could make a great meal out of almost nothing. I’ve never eaten spaghetti like the kind I had in Italy.”³⁸⁴ Many Canadian soldiers recalled that the spaghetti made by the

³⁸⁰ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

³⁸¹ DPR Photos of 3 Cdn Inf Bde in Italy 1943/44, 2 April 1944, 112.3P1 (D1096), DHH.

³⁸² 4 Cdn Fd Pk Sqn RCE War Diary, Part One Orders 45, By Major G.E. Smith RCE, 8 February 1944, LAC.

³⁸³ Dancocks, 69.

³⁸⁴ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

Italian women was of a quality few could match.³⁸⁵ Often, Italian families hosting Canadian soldiers were provided additional foodstuffs on a daily basis by the visiting troops.³⁸⁶ This informal arrangement allowed Italians to acquire supplies that improved the quality of their own meals by adding to the basic provisions they received from the AMG and the town council of Ortona. For example many Italian women would take the canned meats and vegetables provided by the

soldiers and add them to the dried pasta that they had been provided.³⁸⁷ Some Canadians even ventured to areas that were not the most hospitable to enjoy an Italian meal. In the photo to the right, Signora Angela Bozzello is serving a meal

to Paul Morton of the *Toronto Star* in a cave south of the town.³⁸⁸ These meals



21: Signora Angela Bozzello serving a meal to Paul Morton of the *Toronto Star*. 112.3P1 (D1110), DHH.

allowed Canadians to interact with Italians in a very casual environment while both groups mutually benefited by providing one another with various supplies and services

³⁸⁵ Shepherd, 33

³⁸⁶ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009

³⁸⁷ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010

³⁸⁸ DPR Photos of War Correspondents in Italy – 1944, 15 February 1944, DHH

The dinners did not just provide Canadian guests with a good meal, but also an opportunity for the soldiers to see first hand the trials being experienced by the Ortonesi. On a number of occasions after Ortona's liberation, Canadian soldiers had assisted Italians by providing transportation, food, and medical assistance.³⁸⁹ The Italians relied on firewood from the blown-out houses for cooking and keeping warm.³⁹⁰ With many Italian households containing only old men, women, and children, the Canadians occasionally assisted their Italian dinner hosts with some of the more physically demanding tasks. Private Rudy Deutsch and other soldiers of his unit would bring firewood to the nuns of the orphanage that the 5th Field Ambulance had occupied.³⁹¹ Francesca LaSorda recalled that a Black Canadian soldier helped her carry firewood home on a number of occasions.³⁹² This was not the only scenario in which Canadian soldiers would take their free time to help Ortonesi. As the schools in the town had been badly damaged during the fighting, they could not be used for classes. To deal with this problem Canadian soldier's built schools out of wood and stone for Ortonesi children on the southern outskirts of the town.³⁹³ The photo on the following page is of one of the schools that were built by the Canadians.³⁹⁴ These acts displayed a genuine interest by the Canadians in the well being and development of the Ortonesi and they were recognized as such by the latter.

³⁸⁹ Mowat, *The Regiment*, 290-291. See Chapter 2 for references to Canadian medical and ration assistance.

³⁹⁰ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

³⁹¹ Rudy Deutsch interview with the author, 25 January 2010.

³⁹² Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

³⁹³ Nicola Paolini interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009. Confirmed by Angela Arnone that the log cabins were built by the Canadians as schools for Ortonesi children.

³⁹⁴ Authors personal photo collection. In the present day the cabins are used as a civil assistance storage shed and as the office for the Ortona branch of the Italian Alpine Club.



22: School built by Canadian soldiers.
Author's personal photo collection,
September 2009.

Billeting and visits

As the Canadians were billeted with Italian families, a number of the personal friendships derived from the interactions that occurred while the two groups lived with each other. In addition, many Canadian soldiers befriended other Ortonesi in the town and were invited to their homes in the evenings.³⁹⁵ Although language could be a barrier as only a few Canadians and Italians were able to speak each others' languages fluently, genuine friendships were still formed.³⁹⁶ In some cases hand gestures was used to help Ortonesi and Canadians alike get stories and other information across to each other.³⁹⁷ Some Canadian soldiers in Ortona took Italian lessons to improve their Italian vocabulary and bridge the communication gap. An article from the *Red Patch*, titled "Capito Italian" advertised Italian lessons at the education office in Ortona's Dominion Square. The article jokingly asked soldiers if they "want[ed] to learn how to politely refuse a second helping of spaghetti" or

³⁹⁵ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

³⁹⁶ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009. Carceni spoke French and was able to communicate with the French-Canadian soldiers.

³⁹⁷ Shepherd, 33.

extend their vocabulary beyond the words *Un Litro* “One Litre”? The lessons were held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, at 1800 hours, and the instructor was Italian.³⁹⁸

To further facilitate good relations Canadians played different types of games with their Italian hosts to find common interests, establish good relations, and simply pass the time. Lanfranco Berardi recalled that his grandfather frequently played chess with a Canadian Army surgeon.³⁹⁹ Also, Canadians played bingo with the locals, during which time they took the opportunity to practice their Italian. Francesca LaSorda recalled with laughter that for bingo they used dried beans and peas as there was nothing else to use. Other times, Italians and Canadians would sing together. LaSorda remembered a Canadian medic named Richard who had a wonderful singing voice. She remembered Canadians wanting to sing “Finicoli Finicola,” a song from the Naples region, but she did not know the words because it was not a well known song in Ortona.⁴⁰⁰ But Canadian soldiers knowing Italian songs showed that they had picked up some Italian culture in other regions before entering Ortona. While in Ortona, Canadian soldiers became well informed of the history of the Ortonesi. Numerous articles in the *Red Patch* discussed the historical events that shaped Ortona, such as the town’s destruction in 1077 at the hands of the Normans and the damages incurred on the town from a Turkish fleet in 1566.⁴⁰¹ Not all of Ortona’s history related to war and destruction. Ortona had a rich cultural history as well, which also was mentioned. One article of particular interest discussed the musical triumphs of Ortonese Sir Francesco Paolo Tosti, born in 1846, who had performed at Queen Victoria’s Court.⁴⁰² The knowledge gained of Ortona’s history and the simple songs, and games that were played showed that

³⁹⁸ “Capito Italian”, *The Red Patch*, Volume 2 – No. 19, 4 March 1944, CWM, 1.

³⁹⁹ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

⁴⁰⁰ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

⁴⁰¹ “History of Ortona”, *The Red Patch*, Volume 2 – No. 23, 1 April 1944, CWM, 3.

⁴⁰² “Ortona”, *The Red Patch*, Volume 2 – No. 23, 1 April 1944, CWM, 4.

the Canadians were willing to learn aspects of Italian culture, history, and language, which could only have benefited Italian impressions of the latter.

Humour also became a very important facilitator of friendship between liberators and liberated during the visiting and billeting process. Many Ortonesi remarked that the Canadians had a great sense of humour and always liked to joke. On one occasion Francesca LaSorda was holding a sculpture of a sheppard, one of the few possessions her family owned after the battle. A Canadian came by and asked her if the sculpture was Mussolini. LaSorda did not know how to explain in English that it was not Mussolini so she started making sheep noises to explain it was a sheppard. The brief and comic moment allowed Francesca to forget that what she was holding was one of the few intact possessions she had, and she has never forgotten that good laugh she had with that Canadian soldier.⁴⁰³

Other families were provided with the similar stress release through the humour stimulated by the Canadians presence. When the Berardi family returned to their home after the battle, it had been converted into a temporary field hospital. Lanfranco Berardi recalled that he had seen so much death during the battle that, at the age of five, he began to wonder when he would die. The first smile and laughter he experienced since the fighting came was when he saw wounded Canadian soldiers wearing his mother's underwear as bandages. Signora Berardi did not find this as funny as her son did.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

⁴⁰⁴ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

Once the wounded Canadians were evacuated the Berardi house was used to billet soldiers. The family had also returned to a home full of destroyed and missing property. One item that had survived was a special wine jug. This jug was unique in comparison to others because it had extra holes inside of it. The trick to drinking from the jug was that the person would need to plug all the holes with his fingers except one. Some Canadian soldiers, who may have been too pre-occupied with the wine, did not learn the trick and spilled wine all over their uniforms. Although funny for their hosts, the stains ruined the Canadians' battle dress. Signora Berardi was able to take portions of the discarded uniforms and sew them into small Canadian Army uniforms that

her two sons proudly wore. Her son, Lanfranco Berardi, who eventually joined the Italian military and rose to the rank of Colonel, recalled with much pride that he was in Canadian military uniform at the age of five.⁴⁰⁵

Although the Army Act forbade Canadian soldiers from disposing of their uniforms to the civilian population, the Berardi boys were



23: Giordano Berghella with unidentified soldier of the Royal 22^e Régiment. 112.3P1 (D1135), DHH.

not the only children to don Canadian Army uniforms.⁴⁰⁶ The picture above is of nine-year old Giordano Berghella on 13 March 1944 near Ortona. The picture's description notes that

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry War Diary, Lieut-Col. C.B Ware. D.S.O., Commanding Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Order Issue No 9, 23 February 1944, LAC.

Berghella “has picked up a smattering of French and English and knows who, when and how to salute.”⁴⁰⁷ For many Ortonesi children, the Canadian soldiers became role models.

Other forms of humour were less intentional. It was not uncommon to have the odd form of livestock living inside Italian farmers’ households. “Sometimes,” recalled Corporal Maurice White, “you would see chickens walking around in the kitchen.”⁴⁰⁸ Many Italian farmers tried to adopt different ways to protect their possessions and livestock from theft, such as hiding items in different areas in and around their properties.⁴⁰⁹ Chickens were a valued prize among Canadian soldiers. Some troops would even use the eggs from the chickens they ‘found’ and pass them off as gifts to their officers.⁴¹⁰ To avoid having their chickens stolen, the Berardis hid them in the attic. On one occasion, the family hosted an Army chaplain. The chaplain, unaware of the chickens’ presence in the attic, became uncomfortable with the suspicious noises coming from above. He became so restless that he requested to be billeted somewhere else. The Berardis found this episode very entertaining, but they could not reveal the location of their chickens to anyone, especially to the Canadians.⁴¹¹

These casual interactions with the Ortonesi assisted the Canadians in developing a stronger understanding of the people whom they had liberated.⁴¹² The Canadians also received social and psychological benefits from spending time with Italian civilians. Farley Mowat recalled how the casual meals, drinks, and conversations between soldiers and Italians helped “recapture memories dimmed by almost five years of absence.”⁴¹³ As many

⁴⁰⁷ DPR Photos of R22eR in Italy Jan/Mar 1944, 13 March 1944, 112.3P1 (D1135), DHH.

⁴⁰⁸ Maurice White interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

⁴⁰⁹ Scoslowski, *Not All of Us Were Brave*, 111-112.

⁴¹⁰ Thexton, 55.

⁴¹¹ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

⁴¹² Farley Mowat, *The Regiment*, 124-125.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

Canadian soldiers had not been home in years, these informal engagements provided experiences reflective of their civilian lives and reinforced the values and principles underpinning their sacrifices.

The Italians experienced similar emotional connections during their interactions with the Canadian soldiers. Francesca LaSorda reflected that, “the Canadians became brothers to me, as my own brother was still away at war.” Francesca recalled that the young Canadian men in uniform filled a social gap by replacing husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers who had not yet returned. It was the hope of these Italians that their missing family members, held at prisoner-of-war camps or in other parts of German-occupied Europe, were being treated with the same hospitality as the Canadians they were hosting.⁴¹⁴

As the bonds between Italians and Canadians grew, so too did the concern the host families had for their houseguests. Emila Polidoro’s father gave the soldiers billeted with him some hard liquor or wine before they went out on patrol in order to settle their nerves. As a veteran himself, Signore Polidoro identified with the Canadians’ situation and felt that the alcohol would help a little.⁴¹⁵ After months of residing in Ortona it was not uncommon for Italian locals to mourn the death of Canadians with whom they had established close bonds. Francesca LaSorda recalled one young soldier she knew being very distressed one day. The soldier’s brother, who was also serving in Italy, had been killed when his vehicle struck a mine. LaSorda tried her best to comfort him.⁴¹⁶ Those Canadians who died in combat after the occupation were also remembered by their friends in Ortona. Lanfranco Berardi remembers the day his family heard the sad news that a Canadian that they had

⁴¹⁴ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

⁴¹⁵ Emila Polidoro interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

⁴¹⁶ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

befriended had died fighting along the Gothic Line.⁴¹⁷ Once the Italians started to befriend Canadians, they began to understand the sacrifices their liberators had made and continued to make. The photo shows Maria Teresa Berardi, who is Lanfranco's mother, paying her respects to the grave of Lieutenant Georges Frédéric Chicoine of the Royal 22e Régiment.⁴¹⁸ The young lieutenant had been killed on the final day of the fighting at Casa Berardi.⁴¹⁹ Even though the family was fired upon by the soldiers of the 22e Régiment during the fighting, the family had become friends with the Canadians and recognized the sacrifices being made.⁴²⁰



24: Maria Teresa Berardi paying her respects at the grave of Lt Georges Fredric Chicoine of the Royal 22e Régiment. 112.3P1 (D1173), DHH.

Billets were not the only places that Ortonesi and Canadians were able to interact in an informal manner. On one occasion a dance was organized in Ortona, and soldiers were promised that Italian girls would be attending, “so get those shoes shined and don’t forget your dictionary.”⁴²¹ Ortonesi and Canadians also

connected with each other through religious channels. Canadian Protestants from the 1st Canadian Infantry Division had their own separate services, but Catholic soldiers enjoyed

⁴¹⁷ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009.

⁴¹⁸ DPR Photos of Cemeteries, Graves, Funeral Services, Etc in Italy -1944, 13 March 1944, 112 3P1 (D1173), DHH.

⁴¹⁹ Nicholson, 310-315.

⁴²⁰ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009

⁴²¹ “Italian Dance”, *The Red Patch*, Volume 2 – No. 22, 25 March 1944, CWM, 1.

attending mass with Italian civilians and meeting with locals in church.⁴²² Private Rudy Deutsch would regularly attend Italian mass in Ortona with a few French-Canadian catholic soldiers. Deutsch remembered that mass, was in Italian and Latin and occurred every morning.⁴²³ Sharing the same religion between some soldiers and civilians brought about unity, so much so that the Ortonesi gave Canadian soldiers the permission to see the hidden relics of *San Tommaso*.⁴²⁴ The photo shows Don Pietro Di Filvio the parish priest of Ortona's *Basilica San Tommaso* presenting symbolic piece of wood to Major C.W. Gilchrist, a Canadian Public Relations officer. Also present, to the right of Di Filvio is Captain A.J Barker of Saskatoon, one of the Roman Catholic padres on the Italian front.⁴²⁵ Such gestures demonstrated the relevance of the religious links between soldiers and civilians of diverse backgrounds. Italians also sometimes attended regimental church services in the areas occupied by the Canadians while on leave.⁴²⁶



25: Don Pietro Di Filvio, the parish priest of Ortona's *Basilica San Tommaso* presenting symbolic wood to Major C.W. Gilchrist and Capt A.J Barker. 112.3P1 (D1091), DHH.

⁴²² Operations of British, Indian and Dominion Forces In Italy, 3 September 1943 to 2 May 1945, Pt V, 14,15,16,17,18,19& 20, Notes on the work of a Catholic Chaplain, Annex 1, 1, DHH: Farley Mowat, *The Regiment*, 165-166.

⁴²³ Rudy Deutsch interview with the author, 25 January 2010.

⁴²⁴ "Saint Thomas", *The Red Patch*, Volume 2 – No. 23, 1 April 1944, CWM, 3.

⁴²⁵ DPR Photos of 1 Cdn Public Relations Unit in Italy – 1943/44, 11 March 1944, 112.3P1 (D1109), DHH.

⁴²⁶ G.R. Stevens, *The Royal Canadian Regiment 1933-1966*, 125.

Bartering and selling

The bartering and selling of products became a very popular enterprise between the Italians and Canadians. Most Italians had little or nothing to sell or trade because their possessions were destroyed during the fighting.⁴²⁷ Others would simply give the Canadian soldiers what wine or food they had for free.⁴²⁸ Even so, this did not deter those who had items to trade or sell and wanted to make a profit from doing so. It was the role of the Civil Affairs Officer and the AMG to ensure that official rates for products remained fixed.⁴²⁹ In the case of Ortona, the attempts, if any were actually made to control prices, were a complete failure. A 1st Canadian Field Security Section report for January 1944 noted that although relations with the Italians in Ortona were good, “the civilians persist to sell all kinds of junk to the troops at extremely high prices, as the AMG had not established any form of price controls over the trinket and souvenir dealers.”⁴³⁰ Bill Teleske confirmed that “the Italians would always try to sell or deal you something and all the prices were inflated.”⁴³¹ Various military reports and other veterans’ testimonies seem to confirm these unfair dealings, which could only harm relations. Italians had very little to sell and wanted to take advantage of the spending power Canadian soldiers had while on leave.

⁴²⁷ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

⁴²⁸ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

⁴²⁹ *Civil Affairs Handbook ITALY Section 2, Supplement Allied Military Government Manual of the World War*, 83.

⁴³⁰ 1 CDN FD Security Section Int Report No.19 22 Jan 44, No.20, 29 Jan 1944, Copy No 2, 8, DHH.

⁴³¹ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

Wine was one of the most popular commodities traded between Canadians and Italians.⁴³² It was not an uncommon occurrence to see Canadians on leave enjoying a glass of red wine in public, as seen in the photo below, where soldiers of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada are enjoying a few glasses amongst the ruins of Ortona.⁴³³ To control the distribution of wine amongst the soldiers, the Canadian Army established a shop at the 74

Corso Vittoria Emanuele which was meant to facilitate wine orders to all the regiments in Ortona, thus making all other areas where wine was sold or bartered out of bounds.⁴³⁴ As was the case for the selling of trinkets and souvenirs, official documentation on the subject of purchasing wine referred to

“complaints from the [Sergeants] and Officer[s] messes regarding the high prices that Italians [were] permitted to charge for various forms of



26: Unidentified soldiers of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada enjoying a few glasses of wine amongst the ruins of Ortona. *The Battle of Ortona “I Parchi Della Memoria”*.

spirits.” As Canadian soldiers’ spirit rations were inadequate, units were forced to supplement by purchase. However, the price of spirits offered by the Italians was far too high even for resale in officers’ messes.⁴³⁵ The Canadians also needed the additional spirits sold by Italians for various formal gatherings. The Royal Canadian Regiment promised *vino* and scotch to all guests who attended the regiment’s celebration of the 44th anniversary of Paardeberg day on 27 February in Ortona. The event was a celebration of the Royal

⁴³² Maurice White interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

⁴³³ Buonamano, Tavano, and Vanni, 115.

⁴³⁴ Major W.D. Banks, Communications from Town Major of Ortona, 5th Field Ambulance, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps War Diary 1943/01-1944/07, 21 February 1944, LAC

⁴³⁵ 1 CDN FD Security Section Int Report No.19 22 Jan 44, No 20, 29 Jan 1944, Copy No 2, 8, DHH

Canadian Regiment's participation in the fighting that forced the surrender of General Cronje and his four thousand war-weary men during the Boer War.⁴³⁶

As the selling of wine was very lopsided in the Italian dealers' favour, many soldiers and civilians found bartering to be a fairer option. The Canadians needed the "refreshments" offered by Italians for the various social gatherings that they would organize during their leave.⁴³⁷ In turn, the Italians acquired army supplies that, in some cases, they were restricted from possessing.⁴³⁸ Nicola Paolini remembers bartering wine for sugar from Canadian soldiers.⁴³⁹ Some Canadians recalled that blankets were in demand by Italians when bartering.⁴⁴⁰ Other possessions that the Canadians found traded well were jackets and boots.⁴⁴¹ One soldier recalled his Sergeant bartering a pair of boots for some fresh meat and eggs.⁴⁴² Even though bartering army property for wine and other items was strictly forbidden, both groups obtained the items that they wanted or needed.

Problems between civilians and soldiers specifically because of the overindulgence of alcohol was not noted in the official documentation. Instead, arrest reports for Canadian soldiers in Ortona only outlined the convicted soldiers' names, a minor description of the incidents, and summaries of the punishments issued. But articles in the *Red Patch* and accounts from Ortonesi who encountered drunken soldiers within the town reflected that the positive impact of bartering liquor had negative elements to it too.⁴⁴³ One *Red Patch* article entitled "Vino Droolers disgrace to 1st Canadian and Canada" requested that those

⁴³⁶ "Paardeberg Day", *The Red Patch*, Volume 2 – No. 18, 26 February 1944, CWM, 4.

⁴³⁷ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

⁴³⁸ Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry War Diary, Lieut-Col. C.B Ware. D.S.O., Commanding Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Order Issue No 9, 23 February 1944, LAC.

⁴³⁹ Nicola Paolini interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

⁴⁴⁰ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

⁴⁴¹ Rudy Deutsch interview with the author, 25 January 2010.

⁴⁴² Shepherd, 27.

⁴⁴³ See Chapter 2 for accounts of drunken Canadian soldiers in Ortona.

few men who were becoming intoxicated desist for the sake of their own health and for the reputation of the division in which they served.⁴⁴⁴

Odd jobs that made a difference

The Canadian Army and the AMG frequently employed Italian civilians for various forms of skilled and unskilled labour, which mainly involved repairing roads and infrastructure.⁴⁴⁵ Even so, not all Italians could find jobs through the AMG. The informal employment of Italians within the hostels, clubs, and the auxiliary services became another avenue where Italians and Canadians interacted. These employment opportunities were not funded directly by the AMG, but were directly financed by the soldiers on leave.⁴⁴⁶ Soldiers were provided with Allied Lira during pay parades which they would then use to pay for services.⁴⁴⁷

The photo to the right displays two Italians serving Canadian soldiers at the Monastery Inn, a leave hostel for Canadian soldiers.⁴⁴⁸



27: Two unidentified Italians serving Canadian soldiers at the Monastery Inn. 112.3P1 (D1078), DHH.

⁴⁴⁴ “Vino Droolers disgrace to 1st Canadian and Canada”, *The Red Patch*, Volume 2 – No 21, Italy, 18 March 1944 CWM, 1.

⁴⁴⁵ Please see Chapter 2 for examples of formal employment opportunities for Italians in Ortona.

⁴⁴⁶ Labour 9/13/1943-3/9/1945, 24, DHH.

⁴⁴⁷ Rudy Deutsch interview with the author, 25 January 2010.

⁴⁴⁸ DPR Photos of hospitality and recreational photos of Cdn Forces in Italy 14 February 1944, 112 3P1 (D1078), DHH.

Other jobs offered to Italians in the recreational facilities in Ortona included the repair and upkeep of uniforms. Soldiers on leave were still expected to parade regularly.⁴⁴⁹ However, since many of the men were in Ortona for only a forty-eight hour leave and they were not particularly interested in spending their free time cleaning their uniforms, they hired Italians to care for their garments



28: Private K.L. Bowen watching Tommaso Saligante perform repairs on his tunic. 112.3P1 (D1078), DHH.

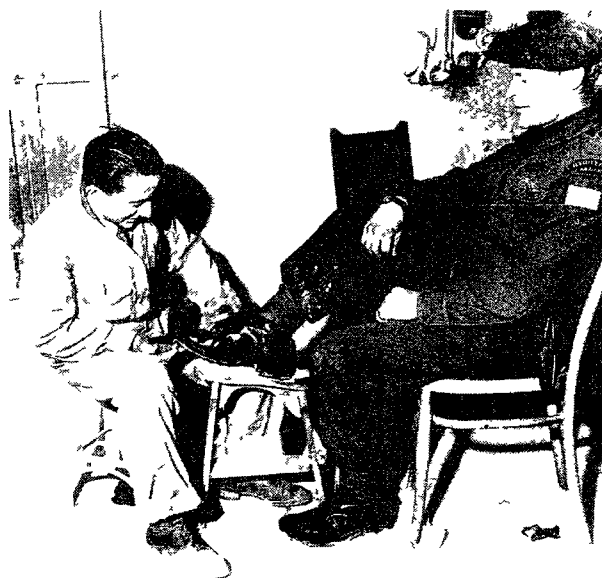
These services allowed Canadian soldiers to participate in more leisure activities. The top right photo show Private K.L Bowen watching Tommaso Saligante perform repairs on his tunic, the second photo, bottom right, shows Private D.S. McKinnel from Calgary having his uniform ironed by Leo Burratini, the tailor of the Monastery Inn. The photo on the following page shows Private E.J. Powney of Dauphin, Manitoba receiving a shoe shine from Aldo



29: Private D.S. McKinnel watching his uniform being ironed by Leo Burratini. 112.3P1 (D1078), DHH.

⁴⁴⁹ Roy, 277

D'Admo at the Monastery Inn.⁴⁵⁰ Although they were not paid by AMG, the Italians still adhered to the ranges outlined in the rates of pay for civilian labour. A tailor with a sewing machine like the one seen in the picture of Signore Saligante would be paid at most eighty Allied Lira a day for his services⁴⁵¹



30: Private E.J Powney receiving a shoe shine from Aldo D'Admo. 112.3P1 (D1078), DHH.

Many Italian men and women found entrepreneurial opportunities by providing services to the Canadians. Francesca LaSorda and her mother and sister washed Canadian soldiers' laundry for Allied Lira and cleaned the linens from the military mess halls in return for canned meats and vegetables.⁴⁵² Corporal Bill Teleske recalled that "the Italian women would come by and ask us if we had clothes that needed washing."⁴⁵³ And they did. The services provided by Italian



31: Private Pete Roney receiving his laundry from an unidentified Italian woman in the town of San Vito. 112.3P1 (D1139), DHH.

women like Francesca and her mother and sister were not uncommon in Ortona and in the

⁴⁵⁰ DPR Photos of hospitality and recreational photos of Cdn Forces in Italy 14 February 1944, 112.3P1 (D1078), DHH.

⁴⁵¹ Labour 9/13/1943-3/9/1945, Annex E – Rates of pay for civilians, 2, DHH. No documents discussing exchange rates of Allied Lira into Canadian dollars were found.

⁴⁵² Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009

⁴⁵³ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

hamlets to the south, where other regiments were sent for rest and relaxation. The photo on the previous page shows Private Pete Roney of Saskatchewan receiving his laundry from an Italian woman in the town of San Vito.⁴⁵⁴

Franco D'Adamo's father also found independent employment with the Canadian soldiers. Signore D'Adamo was a barber before the war and put his skills to cutting Canadian soldiers' hair for Allied Lira.⁴⁵⁵ Other local barbers even visited the Canadian soldiers on duty to cut their hair. The photo below shows Signore Tommaso cutting the hair of Private R.J. Tims of Fredericton, New Brunswick, while Tims was on duty watching for enemy aircraft along the harbour of Ortona.⁴⁵⁶ The casual nature of this photo explains a lot about the interactions that occurred during the informal employment of Italians.

The barriers between civilians and soldiers that had existed during the initial stages of civil re-establishment for the sake of protecting Canadian soldiers from the effects of sabotage are non-existent. The picture represents a shift in attitudes, as Italians were no longer looked on only with suspicion in Ortona. Rather such



32: Private R.J. Tims receiving a haircut from Signore Tommaso beside the Ortona Harbour. 112.3P1 (D1139), DHH.

engagements between the two groups while soldiers remained at their posts became more routine.

⁴⁵⁴ DPR Photos of Sask LI in Italy Sep 43 & Jan-Mar 44, 7 February 1944, 112.3P1 (D1139), DHH.

⁴⁵⁵ Franco D'Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009.

⁴⁵⁶ DPR Photos of Sask LI in Italy Sep 43 & Jan-Mar 44, 10 January 1944, DHH.

These employment opportunities in establishments like the Monastery Inn and through independent means allowed Italians to provide skills that they had acquired prior to the Canadians' arrival. This allowed the soldiers to take advantage of their leave in the town, while also providing jobs to Italians and thus supporting the economy. Moreover these informal employment opportunities allowed Canadians and Italians to build mutual trust and respect.

The informal interactions that occurred in Ortona during and after the civil rebuilding process provided both Canadians and Italians the opportunity to share resources, establish common bonds, and become friends. The Ortona that was rebuilt during this period was not solely based on the Canadians helping the Ortonesi. It was an exhibition of interdependency and mutual benefit. This relationship created an economy strongly based not only on labour and formal and informal commerce, but also one based on trust and compassion. In the months that followed their transfer from the Ortona sector, Canadian soldiers were provided with a number of leave options. Some of the options included Bari, Naples, and Rome.⁴⁵⁷ After helping breaking the Hitler Line, Private Rudy Deutsch and a few other Canadians had a choice about where to go for two weeks of rest. "Our group loaded up with rations and went back to Ortona. We stayed with families we knew there and spent the two weeks with them." Deutsch remembered that "even the Quarter Master came with us and brought plenty of supplies."⁴⁵⁸ For these men who had lost friends and countrymen in Ortona, the town symbolized more than just a place where a hard-fought battle had taken place. It had become a second home, where familiar faces could be found, a

⁴⁵⁷ Bill Teleske interview with the author, 14 March 2010.

⁴⁵⁸ Rudy Deutsch interview with the author, 25 January 2010.

place where the people understood the trials of war and a place where soldiers knew that friendly services were available.

Conclusion

Looking beyond the battle

Nearly seven decades following the end of the war, historians continue to classify the battle of Ortona solely as Canada's "mini Stalingrad", a place that witnessed eight days of heavy urban fighting in late December 1943. The importance of learning these urban warfare lessons was recognized by the army, and the experience was put to good use later on during the campaigns in Western Europe.⁴⁵⁹ Yet for the Canadian soldiers stationed in Ortona in 1944, the town represented more than just the site of a bloody battle. While Canadian historical officers began to overcome the challenges associated with documenting Canada's historical role in Ortona,⁴⁶⁰ soldiers in the town began to ponder their place in Ortona's history. Such sentiments were reflected quite eloquently in an article entitled "Ortona", published in the *Red Patch's* final issue before the Canadians departed in April 1944:

*"Into a water of history following a procession of Romans, Goths, Normans, French, Spanish, and Germans the Canadians have now appeared. What will remain behind as a reminder of their passing? Time heals all the scars of Ortona and yet Ortona never forgets. Perhaps our regimental cemeteries will remain there, perhaps only a name will mark our passing, Seaforth Square, Jasper Avenue, Saskatchewan Drive or again it may be just a battered notice board in a local museum. You are now entering Ortona a West Canadian Town."*⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ Canadian Army Training Memorandum, *Ortona*, September 1944 Issue, NOS 40-57 1944-1945, ATM 42, CWM, 35.

⁴⁶⁰ Cook, 96-103.

⁴⁶¹ "Ortona", *The Red Patch*, Volume 2 – No. 24, 8 April 1944, CWM, 4.

Time has healed most of Ortona's scars and the thought of thousands of Canadians occupying the area can now only be conceived by the new generation of Ortonesi during commemorative ceremonies. Some of Ortona's aging buildings still display the damage suffered during the battle and Canadian Army graffiti is still visible along a few streets within the city centre.

Commemorative markings in the town include a 50th anniversary of liberation plaque, a Sherman tank, the Price of Freedom Monument (seen in the photo) and the establishment of the Battle of Ortona Museum.⁴⁶²



33: Price of Freedom Monument. Author's personal photo collection. September 2009.

Certainly the commemoration of Canada's role in the Battle of Ortona has been etched within the town's walls, yet the question of what Ortona remembers of the Canadians cannot be solely defined in physical form. Understanding the complete connection between the Canadians and the Ortonesi can only be fully expressed by the Ortonesi and Canadian veterans who continue to remember. The majority of Ortonesi were not present during the battle. Some, like Francesca LaSorda and Tommaso Carceni, did not have contact with

⁴⁶² Author's personal photo collection.

Canadians until after the battle.⁴⁶³ Others, like Franco D'Adamo and Lanfranco Berardi had less than cordial first encounters with Canadians.⁴⁶⁴ Many of these survivors returned to destroyed homes. Yet despite the unavoidable destruction the Germans and Canadians wrought on the town during the battle, the Canadians are still viewed as friends and liberators in the eyes of the Ortonesi.⁴⁶⁵

During the 30th anniversary of the liberation of Italy in 1975 Canadian veterans returned to Ortona on a pilgrimage. Present at the commemoration ceremony at the Moro River Cemetery were hundreds of Ortonesi, as seen in the two photos below.⁴⁶⁶



34: Ortonesi at Moro River Cemetery. 1107-006, 58E 34.2, CWM. 35: Canadian veteran with Ortonesi children at Moro River Cemetery. 1980-1107-006, 58E 34.2, CWM.

The Canadian veterans knew why they had come. During the ceremony, Veterans Affairs Minister Daniel MacDonald, himself a former platoon commander with the Cape Breton Highlanders during the battle, celebrated the “overall friendship and trust between the

⁴⁶³ Tommaso Carceni interview with the author, Ortona, 11 September 2009: Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

⁴⁶⁴ Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009 : Franco D'Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009.

⁴⁶⁵ Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009 : Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009

⁴⁶⁶ Veterans Affairs Canada booklet, Image 75-126 and 75-130, located in Willison fonds 1980-1107-006, 58E 34.2, CWM.

Canadians and the Italian farmers and their families on whose land the battles were fought.”⁴⁶⁷ One veteran recalled that “we remember more often than not the hungry people [that] shared what little pasta or rock hard bread or eggs they had with the Canadians who had come into their midst. They shared it with these strangers who had come to live with them for a time in the presence of death and mutual adversity, and we Canadians likewise shared with them what we had.”⁴⁶⁸ The Ortonesi remember the Canadians as liberators and friends who jointly overcame the mutual adversity of rebuilding Ortona and formed genuine friendships. It was because of the time spent clearing the town, exchanging food, living together, and enjoying the simple joys of life (despite the presence of war) that the Canadians and Ortonesi formed unbreakable bonds.

The positive impressions formed by the Ortonesi of the Canadians from December 1943 to April 1944 resonates even in the present. Canadian veteran Rudy Deutsch recalled a few years ago receiving a phone call from a woman named Rosana, an Ortonese who had immigrated to New York. Rosana was only six years old during the battle of Ortona, but she and her family remembered Rudy, who had been a guest in their home during the war.⁴⁶⁹ Francesca LaSorda places flowers at the Price of Freedom Monument every day. Tommaso Cespa has become a volunteer at the Battle of Ortona Museum, where he guides visitors through a maze of pictures and artifacts and retells the story of how Canadian soldiers saved his father’s life.⁴⁷⁰ Franco D’Adamo owns the Hotel Mara along Ortona’s beach front, where he welcomes Canadian pilgrims who visit. Walking into D’Adamo’s office one observes

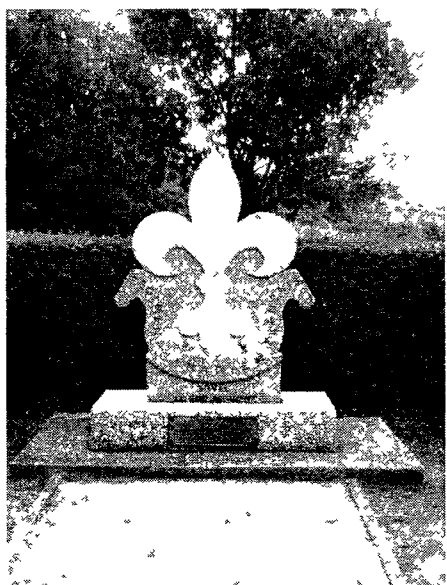
⁴⁶⁷ Stanley Scislowksi, *A Pilgrimage*, (Windsor: Published by Author, 1992), 58.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Rudy Deutsch interview with the author, 25 January 2010.

⁴⁷⁰ Tommaso Cespa interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009; Francesca LaSorda interview with the author, Ortona, 8 September 2009.

Canadian flags draped along his desk.⁴⁷¹ Colonel (retired) Lanfranco Berardi welcomes Canadian visitors to his rebuilt home of Casa Berardi, the site where Captain Paul Triquet earned his Victoria Cross and where many soldiers of the Royal 22e Régiment lost their lives. The Berardi family gave a piece of their land to the “Van Doos”, which was used to erect the monument to the regiment seen in the photo below at left.⁴⁷² The family also allowed a plaque commemorating Triquet to adorn the side of their house. The photo in the bottom right shows Brigadier-General (retired) Triquet and Maria Teresa Berardi beside the plaque in front of Casa Berardi during the 1975 pilgrimage.⁴⁷³



75-135



36: 22e Régiment Monument. Author's personal photo collection. September 2009. 37: Maria Teresa Berardi and General Paul Triquet. 1980-1107-006, 58E 34.2, CWM.

Across the ridge from Casa Berardi is Nicola Paolini's home, a place that also welcomes Canadians. Paolini's farm, known to many Canadian veterans simple as “Vino Ridge”, was the site of the West Nova Scotia Regiment's tragic advance, which cost sixty

⁴⁷¹ Franco D'Adamo interview with the author, Ortona, 9 September 2009

⁴⁷² Col Lanfranco Berardi interview with the author, Ortona, 13 September 2009 : author's personal photo collection.

⁴⁷³ Veterans Affairs Canada booklet, Image 75-135, located in Willison fonds 1980-1107-006, 58E 34.2, CWM.

casualties on 11 December 1943.⁴⁷⁴ During an interview with Signore Paolini, he presented the author with a bottle of home-made red wine. On the bottle was a label with the words Ortona, his family name, and a simple saying *Solo per gli amici*, “Only for my friends” inscribed. Paolini, who was just a young boy in 1943, recalled the fighting between the Canadians and the Germans in the fields where the grapes for his home-made wine now grow. He recalled the friendships made between his family and the Canadian soldiers he encountered, friendships he perpetuates with the new generation of Canadians that he encounters and who are intrigued by the story of his wine label.⁴⁷⁵

Canadian veterans have also continued to reflect on the good relations that were established between themselves and the Ortonesi. Many veterans think about their time in Ortona now more than ever.⁴⁷⁶ As Canadian Ambassador to Italy Robert Fowler stated during a ceremony in Ortona in October 2005, “The strength of [the] ties has been evident over the years and many Canadian veterans of the battle [have] come to consider Ortona as their second home and Ortona's citizens as their family.”⁴⁷⁷

Ortona holds a special place in Canadian military history. By focusing on the interactions between Canadian soldiers and Ortonesi, this thesis has illuminated another perspective to the Canadians’ presence in Ortona, one which has received virtually no attention from the scholarly community. This thesis has identified the impact of the interactions between Canadian soldiers and Ortonesi before, during, and after the battle, and it has offered a clear indication that the positive impressions of the Canadians in Ortona is a direct result of the manner in which the Canadian soldiers behaved with the Ortonesi from

⁴⁷⁴ Nicholson, 306-307.

⁴⁷⁵ Nicola Paolini interview with the author, Ortona, 10 September 2009.

⁴⁷⁶ Rudy Deutsch interview with the author, 25 January 2010.

⁴⁷⁷ Ambassador Robert Fowler, *Battle of Ortona plaque moved to public site*, Department of National Defence, 5 October 2005, <http://www.army.forces.gc.ca/land-terre/news-nouvelles/story-reportage-eng.asp?id=700>.

December 1943 to April 1944. When the author visited the former school houses that were built by the Canadians on the southern outskirts of Ortona, he saw the symbolism of what the buildings represented in the past and what they represents now. The schools were built in a time of war and represented hope, the building of a better future, one that could not be foreseen in 1944, but one-none-the-less that Canadians and Ortonesi worked together to achieve. The bonds made in Ortona, forged in war, have been replaced by that of ongoing mutual commemoration and reflection. And that is how it should be.

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