



Moro River Canadian War Cemetery

By the winter of 1943 the German armies in Italy were defending a line stretching from the Tyrrhenian Sea north of Naples, to the Adriatic Sea south of Ortona. The Allies prepared to break through this line to capture Rome. The 1st Canadian Infantry Division was ordered to cross the Moro River and take Ortona.

On December 6, 1943, the Canadians crossed the river, attempting to capture Villa Rogatti and San Leonardo, two towns on its far bank. The Germans resisted, but the Canadians succeeded in establishing a bridgehead near San Leonardo. The following week, members of the *Royal 22^e Régiment*, supported by tanks of the Ontario Regiment, launched an attack on the flanks of the deep gulley near Casa Berardi, where the Germans held their defensive positions and continually thwarted the Canadian advance. This attack, combined with a further assault by the 48th Highlanders and the Royal Canadians, finally drove the enemy out. After two weeks, the Canadians were free to advance to Ortona. Captain Paul Triquet of the *Royal 22^e Régiment* earned the VC in action here.

The battle for the seaside town of Ortona was one of the most bitter of the war. Ortona was taken after eight days of fierce fighting. The term "mouseholing" has often been used to describe the house-to-house battles there. On December 28, having been driven to the town's northern outskirts, the Germans withdrew. In all, the fighting in December cost the 1st Canadian Division over 500 fatal casualties. In January of 1944 the Canadians made further, but limited, advances and then settled into patrolling activities in this sector until March.



The Moro River Canadian War Cemetery is located on high ground near the Adriatic Sea at San Donato, in the Commune of Ortona (about 5 kilometres south of the town) and the Province of Chieti. In January 1944 the Canadian Corps selected this site, intending that it would contain the graves of those who died during the Ortona battle and in the fighting in the weeks before and after it. Today, there are 1,615 graves in the cemetery, of which over 50 are unidentified and 1,357 are Canadian.