



The Battle of Ortona

Over the course of eight bitter days during the Christmas of 1943, the rubble-filled streets of Ortona saw fierce hand-to-hand fighting between Canadian soldiers and some of the German army's best combat troops.

The seaside town of Ortona was filled with old stone buildings, many of which had been reduced to rubble during the Second World War. The streets were often blocked by the wreckage, limiting the Allies' ability to effectively use their tanks and artillery while offering the Germans many opportunities to create strong defensive positions.

In response to this situation, Canadian soldiers who were fighting from house to house utilized a technique known as "mouse-holing", where they would blow an opening through the walls of adjacent buildings. This provided them cover from the heavy machine gun and sniper fire of the exposed streets of Ortona but it came with the risk of the old houses collapsing down around them.

In the days leading up to the Battle of Ortona, Captain Paul Triquet of the *Royal 22^e Régiment* would earn a Victoria Cross for his brave actions in successfully leading his infantrymen, supported by tanks of the Ontario Regiment, against German positions at Casa Berardi, despite suffering heavy casualties.

After more than a week of fighting in the ruined town that began on December 20, the German forces withdrew and Ortona was officially liberated on December 28, 1943. In total, the fighting in Italy in December of 1943 saw more than 2,600 Canadian casualties, with more than 500 Canadians being killed.