



The Battle of the Liri Valley

In the spring of 1944, German forces in Italy controlled strong defensive positions that ran from north of Ortona down through Cassino and across the Liri Valley to the west coast of the country. To block the Allies' route to liberate Rome, the Germans constructed two formidable lines of fortifications: the Gustav Line and – nearly 15 kilometres behind it – the Adolf Hitler Line.

Serving as part of the Eighth British Army, the 1st Canadian Corps was moved in secret across Italy to help clear the approach to Rome. From May 11-15 Allied forces, supported by the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade, broke through the Gustav Line and pushed the Germans back to the Adolf Hitler Line. On May 18, Polish forces captured Monte Cassino and the massive monastery at its summit.

The 1st Canadian Corps continued its support of the Allied offensive in the Liri Valley as it moved into position for an assault on the Adolf Hitler Line. On May 23, under the cover of heavy mortar and machine gun fire, the Canadians breached the German defences. Tanks of the 5th Canadian Armoured Division pushed through as our troops pursued the Germans across the Melfa River and forced them to rapidly retreat towards Rome, thereby ending major combat operations in the Liri Valley.

Behind the 5th Canadian Armoured Division, our soldiers rapidly advanced to the Italian town of Ceprano where the 1st Canadian Infantry Division then took over. By May 31, Canadian forces had liberated the Italian city of Frosinone and were moved into the reserve by the Eighth British Army.

Roughly 800 Canadians were killed in the Battle of the Liri Valley, while approximately 2,500 more were wounded. The Italian Campaign played an important role in helping the Allies eventually



end the Second World War. The fighting there tied down German soldiers in Italy and kept them from being used to reinforce enemy troops on the Eastern Front or along the coast of Northwest Europe where they could have helped resist the eventual Allied landings on D-Day.