



Youth Remember the Italian Campaign

Fact Quest : Answer Sheet

1. Why did the Allies choose to launch a campaign in Italy in 1943? What was the name of the Italian dictator who led the country at that time?

In 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union and vicious fighting broke out on the Eastern Front. By 1943 the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, asked for help from the other Allied leaders to ease the pressure of this attack. The Allies agreed to help and decided to use Italy (which was aligned with Germany) as a platform to attack enemy territory in Europe and help divert German resources from the Eastern Front.

Benito Mussolini ruled Italy at the time.

2. Why was capturing Sicily strategically important to the Allies? Which Canadian divisions and brigade would take part in the landings in Sicily?

Capturing Sicily helped secure the Mediterranean Sea for Allied shipping. Soldiers from the 1st Canadian Infantry Division and the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade would take part in the Allied landings in Sicily.

3. What happened to some of the Allied ships on the way to Sicily? What losses in Canadian soldiers and equipment were suffered?

Three ships carrying Canadian troops from Great Britain to Sicily for the attack were sunk by enemy submarines in early July 1943. Fifty-eight Canadians drowned and 500 vehicles and a number of guns were lost.

4. What was the codename for the invasion of Sicily and on what date did it occur? Near what city did Canadian soldiers come ashore?

Operation *Husky* – the Allied invasion of Sicily – began in the early morning of July 10, 1943 when Canadian and British troops came ashore along a 60-kilometre stretch of coastline near Pachino at the southern tip of Sicily.

5. On what date did the Canadians and other Allies come ashore in mainland Italy? Enemy troops from what country would be fighting our soldiers there?

The Allies came ashore in mainland Italy on September 3, 1943. After losing Sicily, however, Germany was determined to hold the Italian mainland.

6. In what Italian town did Canadians fight during Christmas 1943? When was the town finally liberated?

One of the most difficult battles for the Canadian troops was the Battle of Ortona during the Christmas of 1943. The Canadians liberated the town on December 28 after more than a week of struggle.

7. What was "mouseholing" and why was it such a useful battlefield tactic in Ortona?

Ortona was an ancient town of castles and stone buildings located on a ledge overlooking the Adriatic Sea. Its narrow, rubble-filled streets limited the use of tanks and artillery. This meant the Canadians had to engage in vicious street fighting and smash their way through walls and buildings—"mouseholing", as it was called.

8. Name some additional battles in which Canadians fought as the Italian Campaign continued throughout 1944 and into 1945?

Notable for Canada was the Battle in the Liri Valley, with the ensuing liberation of Rome by the American army on June 4, 1944. In the late summer and fall of 1944, the Allies broke through Germany's "Gothic Line" in the north.

9. When were Canadian soldiers transferred out of Italy? Where did they fight for the remainder of the Second World War?

Canadian troops did not participate in the final Allied victory in Italy. By February 1945, they had been transferred to Northwest Europe to be reunited with the First Canadian Army. There they joined the Allied advance into the Netherlands and Germany to help finally end the war in Europe.

10. How many Canadians served in the Italian Campaign? How many became casualties and how many died in service there?

More than 93,000 Canadians served in Italy. Canadian casualties in the Italian Campaign totalled more than 26,000, nearly 6,000 of which were fatal.