

EDMONTON'S RUSE AT ORTONA

A western prairie regiment, The Loyal Edmontons have carried out, with distinction, some of the stiffest tasks allotted to Canadians fighting in the Mediterranean theatre.

From Leonforte, Agira and a daring thrust up the Salso valley in Sicily to Potenza, Basilico, Vinchiatura, Colle d'Anchise and the savage eight-day battle for Ortona in Italy, the Edmonton regiment greatly distinguished itself.

Its company commanders are real leaders. Major Jim Stone, Peace River, Alberta, went on the Spitzbergen expedition as company sergeant-major with an Edmonton company. In Ortona he had his rifle shot from his hands by a sniper while taking a bead on a Hun, and he was at the frontmost positions throughout this action.

Major W.G. Longhurst, Edmonton, came to England with the Edmontons as a corporal. He received his majority for distinguished conduct in Ortona where he had to be reminded often that he was a company commander and not a section leader, so close did he keep to his company's spearpoint.

After uneventful days following the Italian landing, Edmonton scouts skirmished with demolition parties of the enemy west of Potenza, had a scrap at Basilico and maintained contact with the enemy up to Vinchiatura, key town southwest of Campobasso. They took the town of Colle d'Anchise after a lively fight, then went into rest at Baranello Station.

From their rest area the Edmontons were thrown into the 21-day battle for the Moro river valley which culminated on December 28 in the capture of Ortona after eight days of house to house fighting against a German Parachute Division.

Ingenious action by an Edmonton company on the final day of the battle for Ortona is credited with hastening the German withdrawal. Up to that day, with Canadians fighting from the bottom of stone houses to the top, the Germans had the advantage. So a plan, formulated by Maj. Longhurst, was put into operation. They fought their way to the top of the first house of a difficult block, and from there on attacked the Germans in each house from the top down. When they cleared one house pioneers blasted a hole in the wall leading into the top floor of the next house. The Germans were taken completely by surprise, and Canadian casualties were cut to a minimum.

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CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS