



Christmas in Hell ~~v1.1~~ v1.6

The Battle of Ortona

December 1943

David Burden

Genesis

- Brief mention in Anthony King's *Urban Warfare*
- UWP podcast with John Spencer by Maj Jayson Geroux, CAF
- Often called "Little Stalingrad"
- Definitive (?) *Ortona* book by Mark Zuehlke
- Boardgame *Christmas in Hell* by Roberto Chiavini from Paul Rohrbaugh's High Flying Dice Games

"That was Ortona. It might be any town through which troops must fight their way" – Christopher Buckley, British War Correspondent, "Road to Rome"

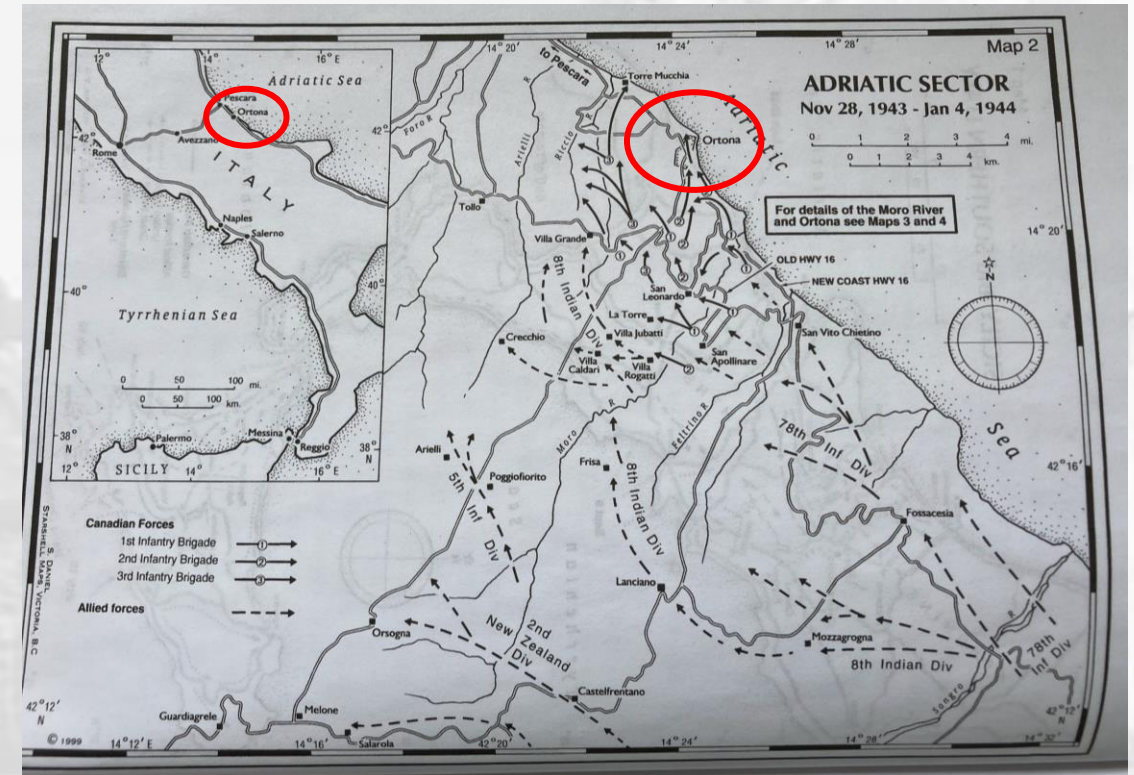
Aims

The background of the slide is a faded, grayscale image of a city street during a battle. In the center, a tank is visible, surrounded by debris and rubble. Buildings line the street, some appearing damaged. The overall scene conveys the intensity and chaos of urban warfare.

- Enable players to understand some of the characteristics of urban warfare
- Experience the narrative of the Battle of Ortona
- Help me begin to formulate ideas and avenues for my PhD!

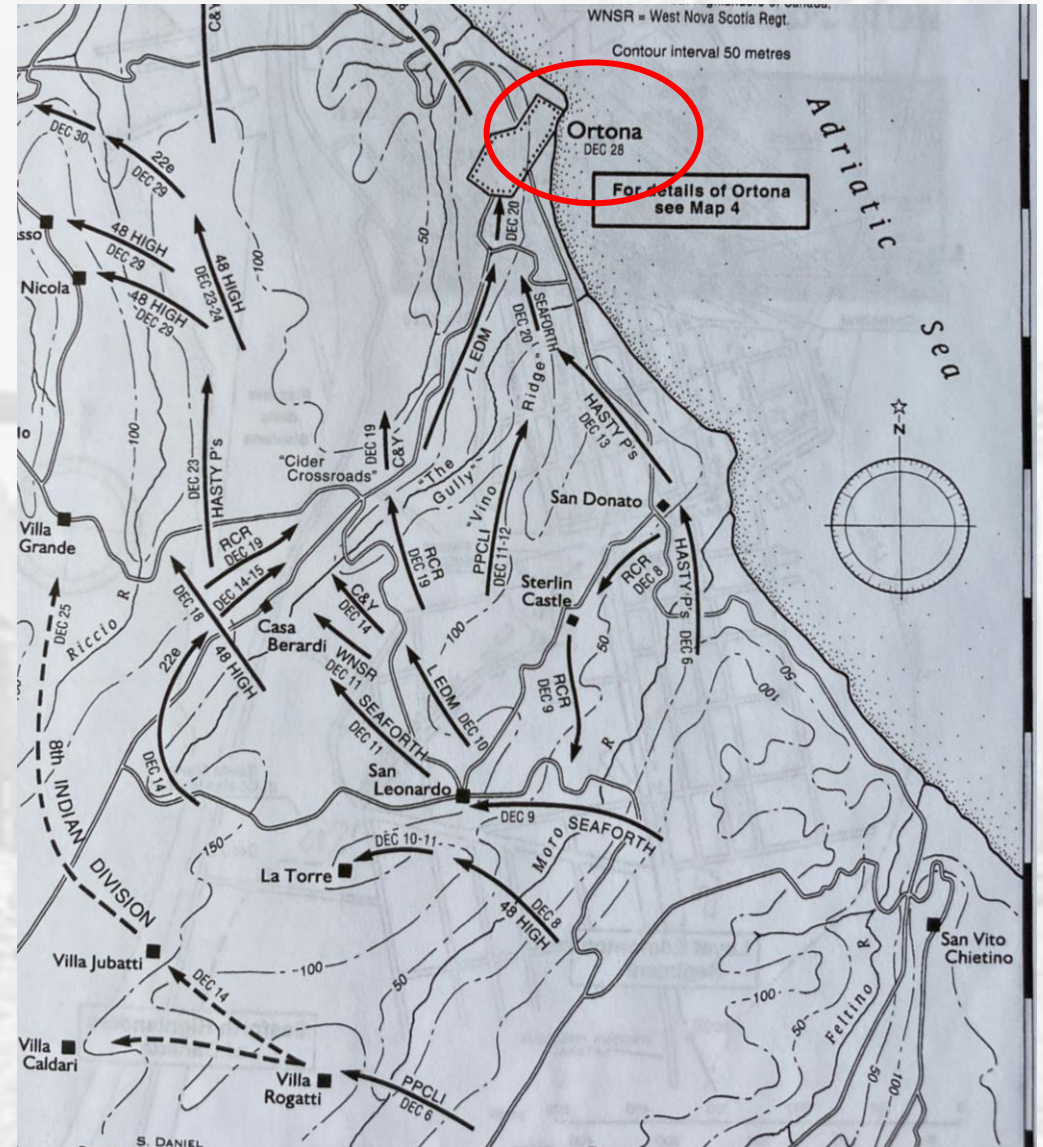
The Road to War

- Allies landed on Italian mainland in Sep 1943
- Push up the E and W coast – Monty trying to beat Patton. Very bloody, numerous river vallies and ravines (e.g. Moro River).
- Successive German defensive lines
- Gustav Line – last line of defence before Rome, from Rome to the Arielli River (just N or Ortona)
- One last push to reach Arielli and then swing around back of Rome and into German rear area



Reaching the Arielli

- V British Corps, 8th Army leading the push with 1st Canadian Inf Div in the lead
- Front being held by German 10th Army, LXXVI Corps, with 1st Para Div in the front
- 1st Canadian Inf Bde to be the main effort, flank to the W of Ortona and then swinging back to the coast and the river
- 2nd Canadian Inf Bde to essentially be the right flank guard, clearing Ortona
- Assault on Ortona started on 20th, but by end of 21st had only reached the edge of the town. It was turning out to be a bit more of a fight than expected.



Orbat & Roles

CANADIANS

- 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Hoffmeister)
 - **Loyal Edmonton Regiment (<400 strong), Lt Col Jefferson**
 - **Seaforth Highlanders (<400 strong), Lt Col Thompson**
 - Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (Bde Res)
 - **3 Rivers Regiment (Shermans), Lt Col Booth**
 - RCA's 90th Anti-Tank Battery, J Troop

GERMANS

- 1st Fallschirmjäger Division, Lt Gen Heidrich
 - **2nd Bn, 3rd Parachute Regiment (elms of)**
 - 2nd Bn, 4th Parachute Regiment (elms of)



Objectives

The background of the slide is a faded, grayscale photograph of a tank, likely a German Tiger II, positioned in a city street. The street is filled with rubble and debris, suggesting a recent battle. The buildings on either side are multi-story and appear to be in various states of destruction. The overall atmosphere is one of a historical military scene.

- Canadians:
 - To clear Ortona of Germans so as to protect the Division flank and to open the coast road as an MSR N to the Arielle.
- Germans:
 - To delay the Canadians as long as possible in order that the rest of 1st Fallschirmjager Division and LXXVI Corps can finalise their defensive position along the Gustav line.

Starting Positions

- Loyal Edmonton Regt
 - A Coy Gp: #9 – Pz Vittoria
 - B Coy Gp: #6
 - C Coy Gp: #4
 - D Coy Gp: #9 – Pz Vittoria
- 3 Rivers Regt:
 - 1 Tp C Sqn (3 Tk) w/ Loyal Eddies & D Coy Seaforths
 - 2 Tp C Sqn (3 Tk) w/ Seaforths (not yet committed)
- Seaforth Highlanders
 - A Coy Gp: #2 (not yet committed)
 - B Coy Gp: #5 (not yet committed)
 - C Coy Gp: #1 (not yet committed)
 - D Coy Gp: #8

Coy Gps have: Inf Coy, and 3 of 4 have 6pdr Section, Engr/Pioneer Section, single Sherman

Note that heavy fighting has already reduced many units, e.g. D Coy Seaforths at 42 cf 100, most others at ~60.

The Ground



The Ground



Model of 1943 Ortona in the Ortona War Museum
Pre-war population ~ 10,000 but many already left

Rules Summary

CHRISTMAS in HELL v1.6.1 DAY TURN QRS

TURN SEQUENCE

1. (Mines), Movement (and Specials)
2. Fire Combat (German, OffTable, Canadian)
3. Close Combat
4. Clearances
5. Reset SUPPRESSED and TASKED
6. German Activity
7. Reinforcement and Recovery. Coy recovers 1 step on 3+ no adj en, 4+ adj en, 5+ same area. Check scenario for other reinforcements.

MOVEMENT

TASK Engr/Tk/AT for Rubble/Mine clearance in RECOVERY phase.

Movt unlimited thru areas w/o rubble or en but stop when:

- Entering area with an unit or not cleared.
- Enters RUBBLE 3+.
- Tank can't go past, fire past OR leave RUBBLE 4.
- Max RUBBLE 4 in aggregate.

NO diagonal movement.

GER units become ACTIVE (or are placed) when CAN enter an uncleared area.

A SUPPRESSED unit cannot complete a move into an area (regardless of whether en still there).

Sniper: 2D6 per sniper. On 6+ 1 unit SUPPRESSED. Max 3 per area. RECYCLE once played. En chooses, not Tank. Can shoot adj if no local tgt.

Booby Traps: Roll 2D, on double one RANDOM Inf/Sapper elm becomes SUPPRESSED. RECYCLE.

Mines: Roll 2D (-1 per engr). RANDOM. On 8+ elim 1 STEP on Inf, others SUPPRESSED, Tank KO on 10+, mark as Wreck. Inc RUBBLE by 1 if hits. One per area per turn, inc for transients. Persists.

Tank Hunters: Roll 2D. +2 if no inf unit. SUPPRESSED on 8+, KO on 10+. RECYCLE. If KO mark as Wreck - blocks tk movement.

Flame: +1 on GER close combat in that area that turn. RECYCLE. FIRES/CAS: As Mines but include own tps and no Engr DM.

CivPop: -1 on all CAN inf fire & close combat that turn whilst evac.

Media: Special

FIRE COMBAT

Germans first, then Canadians. SUPPRESSED units cannot fire. From one area to own (pri) or adj (if flank or no FF). Tk only to Tk area). Can use AT into adjacent if street only if obvious LOS.

Total AT CF values as # of WHITE dice. Remove:

- 1D per unit if firing from different edge, or different Bn
- 1D if tank w/o inf co-loc.

Total Inf CF values as # of GREEN dice. Remove:

- 1D per unit if firing from different edge, or different Bn

Then starting with GREEN dice, adjust dice as follows:

- 1 per RUBBLE in target area
- 1 per PV in target area
- 1 for GER firing against mouseholing CAN.
- 1 per CivPop counter (CAN only).

Roll nD6 (min 1).

For each 5 apply a 1 step reduction in RANDOM en inf unit (see RETREATS).

For each 6 MUST apply against tank/AT gun (max 1 GREEN six) if possible, firers choice, else treat as a 5.

If one DOUBLE then +1 RUBBLE, if 2 DOUBLES or any TRIPLES or more then +2 RUBBLE.

Tank/AT/MG units don't step as normal. First hit SUPPRESSES, 2nd hit KO (in same turn). If KO mark as Wreck - blocks tk movement. Sappers only suffer single SUPPRESSION, no KO.

RETREATS

Units can retreat 1 area instead of 1 step (but only once per combat). Only to area free of En or uncleared (will trigger reveal/opportunity fire) unless Tk. AT & Engr MUST retreat as well if would be left alone.

German Priority: Retreat if not MDA. GER elim if must retreat into area with CAN.

STACKING

Unlimited BUT max 1 Coy Gp, 1 tk, 1AT and 2 Engrs may move/attack across any area edge or within an area per turn.

CLOSE COMBAT

Must be led by Coy. SUPPRESSED units can't start or support Close Combat. Treat all units in area as a single combat. Do CAN first, GER only if they survive or not attacked.

1D6 + DMs

- +1 ea Coy after 1st (not GER)
- +1 AT in Sp
- +2 tk in Sp (only +1 if adj)
- 1 ea extra GER unit (+1 for GER)
- +1 for each inf CF > DF
- (Tgt UrbanFac - Own UrbanFac)(if > 0)
- 1 Civpop (if CAN)
- /+1 flamethrower (CAN/GER)
- +/-1 mouseholing (CAN/GER)

On 6+

GER: All units eliminated.
CAN: RETREAT WHOLE Coy Gp, Elim if can't.

On 7+

As above plus RUBBLE+1

AT/Engr units have no CC value, elim if with en but left w/o Inf/Tk.

CLEARANCES

RUBBLE: UNSUPPRESSED TASKED Engr or AT/Tk and no GER units. Reduce RUBBLE by D3 to min of 1. Max 1 unit/area.

MINES: UNSUPPRESSED TASKED Engr and no GER units: Roll D6 + #Engrs. Clear mines on 5+. DM+1 per failed turn. RECYCLE.

WRECKS: UNSUPPRESSED TASKED Engr or Tk and no GER units. Roll D6 + #Units (max 2). Clear wreck on 3+. DM+1 per failed turn.

RESET

All SUPPRESSED units recover and remove suppression. All TASKED removed.

MOUSEHOLE: Mousehole skill (once gained) spreads from Eddies to Seaforths turn after.

GERMAN ACTIVITY

Free Moves: Any GER unit can move 1 area, not into cleared area and NOT from MDA to non-MDA.

Ambush: GER MAY activate troops in any uncleared area.

OFF TABLE

2D6 per unit, fired as normal (but only -PV, not -Rubble).

Can fire only against areas: 16,21,27,30. Player chooses area(s).

BATTLE OF ORTONA - DEC 1943

CREDITS
Original Christmas in Hell Game: Roberto Chavini, Paul Rahnbaugh, High Flying Dice Games.
V1.6 Game Changes and new Map Design: David Burden
Map based on OpenStreetMap mapping and modified based on contemporary aerial photo and field sketch in Jayson Gowen's Battle of Ortona IMA, 2021.
Tank icon from icons.com

Day
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29

TURN SEQUENCE

- Movement
- Fire Combat (GER, OffTable, CAN)
- Close Combat
- Clear Rubble & Mines
- Reset Suppressed & Tasked
- German Movement
- Allied Reinforcement

KEY

- 15 Area Number
- Tanks Allowed
- Protective Value
- Ends move
- Tank can't move past
- Max 4 Rubble per move

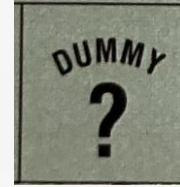
Counters and States



CAN INF
AF-Steps- DF



GER INF
AF-Steps-DF



DUMMY
Recycle



SUPPRESSED
Can't fire/asslt



ENGRS
Only Suppressed



GER MG
AF-Steps-DF



MINE
8+ -> STEP/SUPP.
Persists
Recycle when clrd



TASKED
Can't fire/asslt



TANK
AF-Steps-DF
Suppressed/KO



GER AT GUN
AF-Steps



SNIPER
6+ -> SUPPRESS
Recycle



FLOT



AT GUN
AF-Steps
Suppressed/KO



RUBBLE
3 – stops Inf
2 – stops Tks
4 – Impass. to Tks
4 total max move



BOOBY TRAP
Double -> SUPPRESS
Recycle



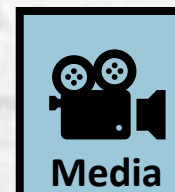
FLAMETHROWERS
+1 German C/Cbt
Recycle



TANK HUNTER
8+
Recycle



CIVILIANS
-1 Cbt
Recycle



MEDIA
Special
Remove

Turn Sequence/Rules

- Canadian Movement (TASK, 4/3/2 Rubble limit, disclose and trigger specials, move to area edge)
- Fire Combat (Germans, Off-table, Canadian)(to own or adj area)(tk only adj if Tk marker)
- Close Combat (if not SUPPRESSED, Canadians, Germans (if survive), move into area)
- Clearances and Reset (try and clear Mines & Rubble, remove SUPPRESSED/TASKED)
- German Movement (can move 1 area, or reveal, or recycle if not in contact)
- Reinforcements (3+/4+/5+)

Questions?



Let Battle Commence



Immediate Aftermath

- Canadian Losses (Geroux2021:169-170)
 - Eddies: 63 killed, 109 wounded (of 669)?!
 - Seaforths: 41 killed, 62 wounded (of 638)?!
- German Losses (vs 1 & 2 CIB) (Geroux2021:170)
 - 68 killed, 159 wounded, 205 missing, 23 sick
 - But ea. bn left ~ 120-150 strong
- c. 1314 civilians killed, of a pre-war population of c. (Zuehlke:375)
- ~2-3 bombardments per day for the next few days
- Burials into January
- 20% of cas were battle exhausted, only 20% of those returned to front line
- PPCLI did FPOL and reached obj ~1mile N h/way to Torre Mucchia by 28/12 without firing a shot

Pte Boyd: 49 L Edm R

Rescued
after being
buried 3 1/2
days in
rubble at
Ortona (sole
survivor in
his platoon)



*Sorry we can't stay to put mistletoe on,
but we'll make it hot for you in the hills*

Media

Contemporay Reportage

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvlO7dJUkgw&ab_channel=BritishPath%C3%A9 – a&v (1m 37s)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrBJsDuo7bl&ab_channel=DavidMcGuffin - audio

Documentary reports

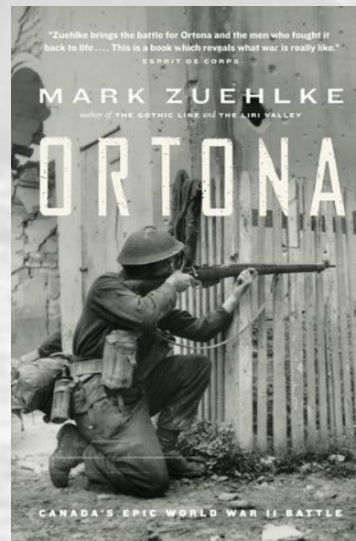
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoxEmlJ1Mw&ab_channel=canmildoc – video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivfxyMA39SA&ab_channel=TriacanthosNecromantia – British Army Documentary (with interviews, c. 1970?)



The Lore

- CBC and Capt Charles Comfort
- Lasting bonds between the Canadiense & Ortonisi
- Dec 43 – CBC commentator identified battle would figure in the battle lore of Canada (Z381)
- But largely forgotten elsewhere – not controversial, overshadowed by Normany/Juno (Z381/382)



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpQA1Rm7FNY&ab_channel=BeyondtheBrick

The Lessons

- Rubble
- Combined Arms
- The danger from snipers and booby-traps
- Man-handling smaller AT guns
- Mouseholing and the Vertical approach to CQB
- Delegated forward command



Epilogue

"I recall with embarrassment, an incident at 45th Infantry Divisional Battle School during the Spring of 1944. An exceptionally tall and good natured Canadian officer had been sent to the School to give a talk on the street fighting he had experienced in [Ortona in] Italy. It was an interesting talk but some of his advice ran contrary to that being taught at the School. When the lecture was over, the Chief Instructor, with insulting condescension, thanked this shy and kindly man for a vivid 'word picture' and, turning to the students, warned us that, as this officer's experience was probably unusual, we had best not stray from the DS Solution, as taught at that School. The poor Canadian did not even notice this refined English insult."

Jary, Sidney. (1988). *18 Platoon*. Bristol: Sydney Jary Publishing

Questions and Discussion



Questions and Discussion



- What does the game do well in terms of Urban Warfare?
- What does the game do badly in terms of Urban Warfare?
- What parts of the game/experience did you particularly like?
- What parts of the game/experience did you particularly dislike?
- Was it enjoyable?
- Did you learn anything?

My Changes

- New map
- Aligned zones
- Zonal ratings
- Reduce to Coy manoeuvre units cf PI, eliminate HQs and MGs
- White and Green dice for AP/AT cbt and extra rubble (cf separate throws)
- Add in 6pdrs
- Mouseholing
- CivPop, Flame, Media special events
- Day cf am/pm/eve turns
- Narrative



Next Steps



- Card based generic version (Rubble Town)
- Develop as a generic WW2 Urban Combat set – *Urban One*
 - Evolve into optional 2-player oppositional
 - Apply to other battles, e.g. Aachen, Rees
- Inform my own Bn/Bde level modern urban rules – *Urban Combat Commander*

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