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Trial by Fire: Major-General Christopher Vokes at the Battles of the Moro River and Ortona, December 1943

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During the month of December 1943, the 1st Canadian Infantry Division (1st Cdn Div) underwent the most severe trial yet experienced by Canadian troops in Italy, when it crossed the Moro River, engaged two German divisions in rapid succession and, after a week of vicious street fighting, took the town of Ortona. Hailed at the time as victories, these battles have since been the subject of considerable debate among soldiers and historians alike. Much of the controversy has revolved around the division's commander, Major-General Christopher Vokes, who has been accused by some of mishandling his formation, and has been castigated by others for the heavy cost in lives that resulted.[1] Are these verdicts too harsh? Was he solely to blame for the manner in which the battles of the Moro River and Ortona evolved, and for their tragic cost? In order to better understand Chris Vokes' actions during his first divisional battle, it will be argued that he did indeed make mistakes but at the same time was forced to deal with an extremely difficult set of circumstances that largely dictated the course and outcome of the battle. These included a strategic situation that created the conditions for a war of attrition; an unrealistic Army Group-level plan; unfavourable terrain and weather; unexpected changes in German defensive tactics; the "fog of war"; and his own inexperience as a divisional commander. As a result Vokes faced the toughest challenge of his military career.

In May 1943 the Allies decided to expand their operations in the Mediterranean beyond the taking of Sicily by invading Italy.[2] The objectives of this move were to knock Italy out of the war and force Germany to deploy a substantial force to protect its southern flank. This would aid the Soviets on the Eastern Front, and potentially stretch Germany's military resources to the breaking point, especially following Operation Overlord, the forthcoming cross-Channel invasion of Europe. Despite these lofty goals, however, it would be a strictly limited effort. So as not to jeopardize the success of Overlord, it was agreed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff that the commitment in the Mediterranean would not be reinforced. Further, some seven divisions (four American and three British) would be readied for transfer back to Britain after 1 November 1943, along with some air assets.[3] As a result of these decisions, the Italian theatre was deemed to be of secondary importance even before military operations commenced.

The Allied strategic concept was not without risk, for it was possible to be too successful in tying down the Germans in Italy. It is considered axiomatic within military circles that in order to successfully attack a defended position, the attacking force should have at least three times the estimated combat power of the defenders.[4] The danger was that if the enemy fielded enough troops to make the ratio of attackers to defenders less than the desired three to one, the campaign could easily turn into a war of attrition. The rapid German response to the landing of General Sir Bernard Montgomery's Eighth Army at the "toe" of the Italian boot on 3 September and that of the US Fifth Army at the Gulf of Salerno on the 9th seemed to point to just that result. The Germans immediately implemented Operation Axis, which directed Colonel-General Heinrich von Vietinghoff's Tenth Army to disarm the Italian armed forces and concentrate in the Rome sector, while eight divisions from Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Army Group B occupied northern Italy.[5] By the middle of September, the Germans

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had committed some 16 divisions. Within six weeks that number had grown to an estimated 24, while those of the Allies numbered 11. Given the smaller size of German divisions (some were being re-constituted) and that not all were engaged at once, the opposing armies in Italy were roughly equal. Allied air superiority notwithstanding, this helped set the stage for the bloody slogging match that would characterize the Italian campaign.[6]

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Major-General Chris Vokes, general officer commanding, 1st Canadian Infantry Division.

Decisions made at the theatre level also shaped the future Canadian battles. Rome was the next major objective, but taking it presented a significant problem for the Allied ground commander in Italy, General Sir Harold Alexander, who commanded the 15th Army Group. Geographically separated by the Apennine Mountains, the Eighth and Fifth Armies were operating practically independently of each other, with the former advancing in the centre and along the Adriatic coast while in the west the Americans were nearing Naples. Given the estimated German strength in Italy, it was clear that the Fifth Army lacked sufficient combat power to take Rome on its own, and so by 8 November 1943 Headquarters 15th Army Group, with considerable input from Montgomery, produced a coordinated plan of attack that would involve both formations.[7] The Eighth Army operation, code-named Encroach, was intended to begin on 20 November. Lieutenant-General Charles Allfrey's V Corps would cross the Sangro River, drive north along the Adriatic coast to the town of Pescara and then use a lateral highway through the Apennines to approach the Eternal City from the east. Lieutenant-General Miles Dempsey's XIII Corps would mount a diversionary attack in the central region. At the same time, the Fifth Army would advance directly on Rome from the south along the Tyrrhenian coast. The combination of these assaults, it was believed, would compel the Germans to abandon the city.[8]

General Montgomery was optimistic about the forthcoming battle. On 25 November, a few days after the Eighth Army attack had begun, he issued a personal message to his troops in which he boldly announced, "WE WILL NOW HIT THE GERMANS A COLOSSAL CRACK."[9] But almost immediately it was apparent that the reality on the ground was vastly different. It took V Corps four days to force a crossing of the Sangro River, due to the combined effects of bad weather and fierce German resistance. This belated success came at the cost of heavy casualties, and by 1 December the lead British formation, the 78th Division, was so reduced in strength that it was of little further use in an attacking role.[10] The war in Italy was proving to be one of attrition. With the Army still a long way from Pescara, Montgomery became increasingly worried that his "colossal crack" was degenerating into a colossal failure. In early

December, he wrote to General Sir Alan Brooke, the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), that "I am fighting a hell of a battle here…I don't think we can get any spectacular results so long as it goes on raining."[11] Montgomery still had hopes of breathing new life into the offensive. First Cdn Div had been resting near the town of Campobasso throughout November, and was relatively fresh. Accordingly, on 27 November 1943, the Canadians received a Warning Order from HQ V Corps to be prepared to relieve 78th Div along the Moro River.[12]

At this point in time, 1st Cdn Div had been in action as part of the Eighth Army for nearly five months, having joined that formation the previous July when, along with the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade (1st CAB), it participated in Operation Husky, the Allied conquest of Sicily. Both formations had crossed over to Italy in September, gaining more battle experience. By November, the Canadians considered themselves veteran soldiers who "knew the score." Despite this growing sense of confidence, however, some were uneasy about replacing 78th Division as the spearhead of V Corps' assault. Farley Mowat, then the Intelligence Officer for the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment (Hasty Pees), later recalled the disbelief that he and his Commanding Officer, Major Bert Kennedy, felt on being told at a divisional conference that the advance would be "plain sailing." Both men believed that the weather and the enemy would reduce the rate of advance to a crawl.[13]

It is worth noting that at the time, Major-General Chris Vokes, the division's General Officer Commanding (GOC), seemed every bit as confident as Montgomery.[14] Vokes, a Permanent Force officer, had risen quickly through the ranks and by the spring of 1942 he was a brigadier commanding the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade (2nd CIB).[15] He earned "a certain reputation for success" in Sicily and on 1 November 1943, having already served as acting GOC of 1st Cdn Div for a few weeks while Major-General Simonds was sick with jaundice, he was promoted to the rank of major-general and formally given command of the division. Only 39 years old, this distinction came as a pleasant surprise, and it undoubtedly boosted his self-confidence.[16] Vokes, moreover, was very confident in the abilities of his men, who had taken every objective assigned to them thus far. Finally, he believed that "it is [the] task [of] a commander to inspire their confidence and get the best out of them."[17] Chris Vokes was largely successful in doing so. Bert Hoffmeister, then the highly regarded commander of 2nd CIB, later said that Vokes was the only Canadian general under whom he served that had this ability. Many in 1st Cdn Div felt the same way.[18]

Vokes' attitude may also have had something to do with his acceptance of the fact that although he was a divisional commander, he was still only one link in the Eighth Army chain of command, and as such he had to follow orders as much as any private soldier did.[19] The chain of command, of course, was fundamental: it was how the military worked. In Italy, it was General Montgomery who determined how the Eighth Army's battle would be fought, and he assigned tasks to his Corps commanders and they in turn to the divisional commanders who were responsible to execute Montgomery's plan. If there were problems with a superior officer's plan, and in the case of Operation Encroach the reliance on good weather to assure a speedy advance was certainly problematic, a subordinate officer had to be very careful about how to approach the subject. There is no evidence that Vokes questioned the plan[20] and he dutifully carried it out.

First Cdn Div began to relieve 78th Div on 1 December, and by the following afternoon Vokes had assumed command of the new sector.[21] Initially, however, he had only two of his three infantry brigades. Third CIB, temporarily detached to XIII Corps, was delayed by a sudden washout of the British bridges over the Sangro and only rejoined the division on 6 December. Vokes did have the 4th British Armoured Brigade (4th BAB), which was replaced by 1st CAB on 7 December. The total Canadian presence at the Moro eventually numbered nearly 26,500 officers and men.[22] The battle began before his last two Canadian formations arrived. On 4 December, with the handover from 78th Division not quite complete, an urgent message was received at HQ 1st Cdn Div from Lieutenant-General Allfrey, telling Vokes that "[he] must get over RIVER MORO as soon as possible."[23]

To Vokes it was clear that the ground, as much as the Germans, would dictate the manner in which much of the division's battle would be fought. The whole sector was dotted with small

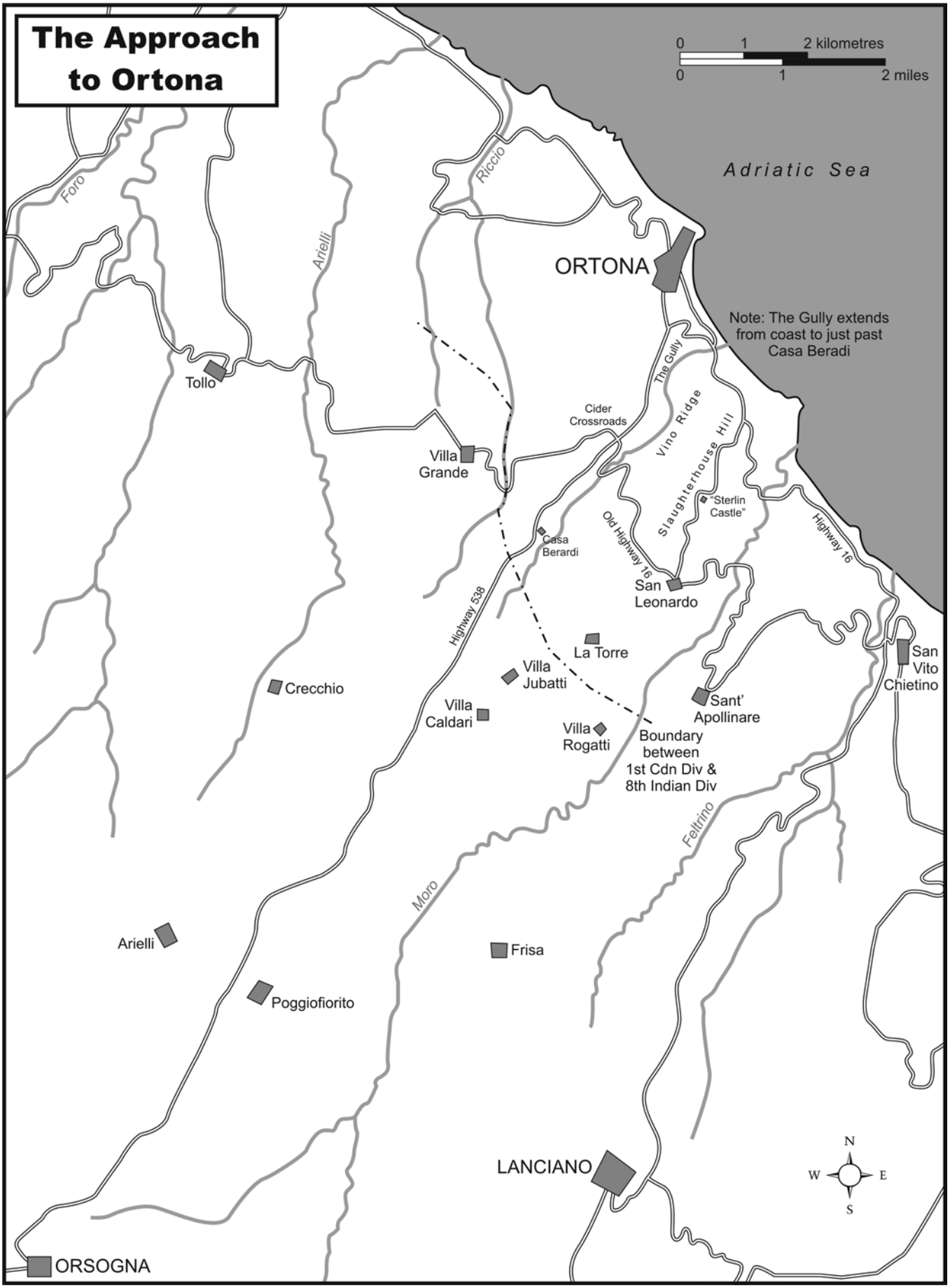
farms, with olive groves and vineyards covering the slopes of the numerous valleys and ravines. On the right flank were the Adriatic Sea and a new road called Highway 16 (which did not appear on the Canadian maps)[24] that followed the coastline northeast across the Moro Valley in the direction of Ortona. The Moro River was just a small stream, nestled in a long, winding valley averaging 700 metres across and 100 metres deep. On the far side of the river, the ground rose gradually, culminating in a plateau about three kilometres away that was known as Vino Ridge. Almost immediately behind Vino Ridge was a deep ravine that ran in a generally northeast direction, roughly parallel to Highway 538 that connected the towns of Ortona and Orsogna. Some 180 metres across at its widest point, 180 metres deep, and nearly five kilometres long, this feature gradually became shallower as it ran inland. The Canadians called it "the Gully."[25] Just beyond the Gully, on a bluff overlooking the Adriatic, lay the town of Ortona, situated at the intersection of the new Highway 16 and the Ortona – Orsogna road. About five kilometres north of Ortona was the Arielli River, the next major natural feature. In the centre was a much older road, the original Highway 16, which snaked through the Moro Valley, climbed the far bank to the village of San Leonardo and wound its way to the northwest, crossing the Gully before it intersected with Highway 538. This important crossroads was given the code name "Cider."[26] On the left of the divisional area there were few roads, but the terrain between the hamlet of Villa Rogatti, located on the Moro three kilometres upstream from San Leonardo, and Highway 538 seemed to be passable for infantry and tanks.

The effect of weather on military operations was a crucial tactical consideration. Winter on the Adriatic coast brought a mix of rain, snow, and sleet, along with flash floods that turned the few roads and the surrounding countryside into a muddy quagmire. Even dismounted infantry found it difficult to move about the battlefield.[27] Additionally, the sky was frequently overcast, which prevented the Allied Desert Air Force from providing the high degree of close air support that the ground forces had come to expect. As a result air cover was spotty throughout the month. It is true that the Germans' ability to conduct lateral movements, shift gun positions or to conduct re-supply operations were also affected. But, the effects of weather, combined with the nature of the ground, would more greatly hamper the attackers whose need for mobility was imperative.

Having surveyed the ground, Vokes developed his plan – a three-phase operation. First, the division would have to gain a bridgehead over the Moro River. Secondly, he would push forward to seize the "Cider" crossroads, which would cut Highway 538 and allow him to either bypass Ortona or proceed directly into town. The final phase would be the capture of Ortona itself. This would outflank the Germans' positions at Orsogna and compel them to withdraw to their next likely line of defence along the Arielli River, as well as gain for the Eighth Army use of the town's rail and port facilities for logistical purposes.[28]

Chris Vokes immediately recognized that the need to construct Bailey bridges would be "a major limiting factor in [the division's] rate of advance," a fact that was especially true in the case of executing a successful crossing of the Moro River.[29] The Moro's steep banks made it an obstacle that tanks could not negotiate, and intimate tank support to the assaulting infantry was crucial if the crossing was to succeed, especially if the Germans counterattacked with their own armour.[30] To get the tanks across would require a strong bridge, and as the Germans had already destroyed the few bridges in the area, the Royal Canadian Engineers (RCE) would have to build one, using the Bailey assault bridging kits. A Bailey bridge could not be built just anywhere and so practically the first thing that Vokes did upon assuming command of the sector was to order his units to find potential crossings with suitable bridging sites.[31]

Viable approach routes to the "Cider" crossroads were essential once the river crossing had been completed. This requirement was based on two key considerations. First, advancing troops required sufficient space to manoeuvre. Secondly, while tanks and infantry could go cross-country, the division depended on the daily delivery of tons of ammunition, fuel, and food in the heavy trucks operated by the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps in order to keep fighting, and the trucks needed roads. Although the 1st Canadian Divisional Mule Transporter Company had been established in Sicily to support


The Approach to Ortona
0 1 2 kilometres
0 1 2 miles
Adriatic Sea
Foro
Arielli
Riccio
ORTONA
Note: The Gully extends from coast to just past Casa Beradi
Tollo
The Gully
Cider Crossroads
Vino Ridge
Slaughterhouse Hill
Villa Grande
"Sterlin Castle"
Casa Berardi
Old Highway 16
Highway 16
San Leonardo
Highway 538
La Torre
Villa Jubatti
San Vito Chietino
Crecchio
Villa Caldari
Sant' Apollinare
Villa Rogatti
Boundary between 1st Cdn Div & 8th Indian Div
Feltrino
Moro
Arielli
Frisa
Poggiofiorito
LANCIANO
ORSOGNA
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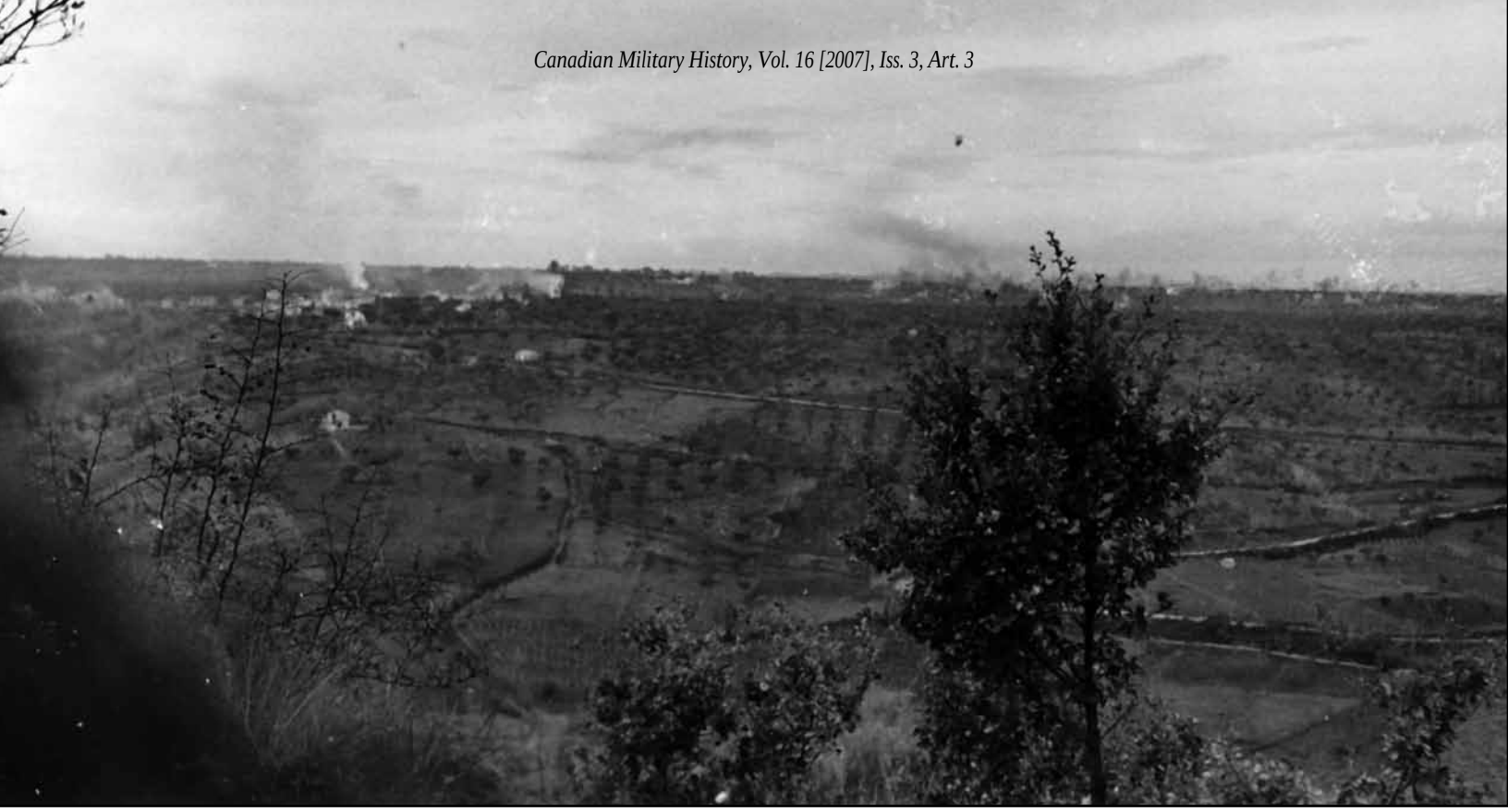
Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2007



An aerial view of the Canadian artillery barrage which preceeded the attack on the Moro River by 1st Canadian Infantry Division, 8 December 1943.

dismounted infantry in mountainous terrain,[32] the amount that the mules could actually carry was limited. The mules could only augment, not replace, wheeled transport.

Vokes decided to make his main effort in the centre near San Leonardo, which seemed to offer the most advantages. He ordered two diversionary assaults to be made as well, one at Villa Rogatti and another just inland from the coast. These operations began on 5 December. Brigadier Hoffmeister's 2nd CIB was assigned the main role in the operation. The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada launched the main assault at San Leonardo while the diversionary attack at Villa Rogatti was conducted by the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). The coastal diversion was mounted by 1st CIB's Hasty Pees.[33] Determined German opposition stopped the main attack by the Seaforths cold, and the supporting tanks were unable to cross the river to assist. The diversionary crossings proved to be more successful, with the PPCLI bridgehead offering a glittering opportunity to outflank the enemy stronghold in San Leonardo and also the town of Ortona. For this reason, Hoffmeister asked Vokes on 6 December for permission to stop the assault at San Leonardo and reinforce the Patricias.[34] Vokes agreed, ordering Hoffmeister to commit another battalion. That unit, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, had only begun to move towards Villa Rogatti when it received orders cancelling the operation. The next day, the PPCLI was ordered to hand over the hamlet to the 8th Indian Division (8 Ind Div).[35]

Historian Michael Cessford has criticized this move, saying that Vokes discounted the potential offered by the PPCLI bridgehead:[36] Vokes' orders to Hoffmeister, however, clearly indicate that such was not the case. In fact, the change in plan derived from two factors, both of which could be ascribed to "the fog of war." The first revolved around the viability of a bridging site at Villa Rogatti. As the 2nd CIB war diarist recorded, "an engineer recce [reconnaissance] carried out by 3rd Fd Coy RCE [3rd Field Company] reported that it was impossible to build a bridge over the river owing to the great difference in height between the near and far banks."[37] This meant that sustaining an expanded bridgehead was out of the question. Unfortunately, this assessment was quickly proven to be incorrect, for just three days later engineers from 8 Ind Div, specifically 69 Fd Coy of the Bengal Sappers, erected a Bailey bridge at the very location that the Canadians had just rejected.[38] Apparently, 3rd Fd Coy had only looked at constructing a bridge from the near

bank of the Moro which was the normal practice. The Bengal Sappers, however, built the bridge in reverse by manhandling every piece of the Bailey bridge assembly to the far shore in order to build the bridge from the higher bank.[39] Justifiably proud of their accomplishment, the Indians named the new structure "Impossible Bridge." Vokes, who had joined the Permanent Force as an RCE officer, later commented, "I can tell you I was in an evil temper when I learned about this, but by then it was far too late."[40] Perhaps not surprisingly, the war diaries of both 3rd Fd Coy and the divisional Engineer staff are silent regarding their decisions at Villa Rogatti.[41]

Secondly, Lieutenant-General Allfrey thought 1st Cdn Div had failed to force a crossing of the Moro due to an insufficient concentration of force, rather than the combination of vigorous German opposition and poor mobility resulting from the effects of the rough terrain and bad weather.[42] The corps commander therefore reduced the division's frontage, believing that this would solve the problem and allow Vokes to press on quickly. The division's new left boundary followed a path roughly half-way between San Leonardo and Villa Rogatti paralleling old Highway 16 through to Highway 538, and then onward to Villa Grande, located about four kilometres southwest of Ortona. To Vokes, this line was as real as a barbed wire fence, for it delineated his responsibility for terrain and allowed him to plan operations without conflicting with those of flanking formations.[43] The boundary shift placed Villa Rogatti outside of his assigned area.

In the short term, Vokes was forced to adjust his plan yet again, with the intention now being to use his remaining toehold on the enemy side of the Moro, tenuously held by the Hasty Pees, to break out and, striking laterally across the front of the German defences, attempt to take San Leonardo. At the same time, the village was to be assaulted frontally. This risky and costly operation began on 7 December and prompted The Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) to call the ridge "Slaughterhouse Hill."[44] Not until the night of 9 December was 1st Cdn Div fully across the Moro River.

The long-term effects were much more significant. The loss of the PPCLI bridgehead "cost the 1st Division a real opportunity to penetrate the German defences."[45] This view was reinforced by the Canadian official history which pointed out that "instead of outflanking San Leonardo from the left and then advancing along the grain of the country the Canadians were now to become involved in a series of costly frontal assaults in which advantages of topography lay with the defenders."[46] It meant that the Gully, where some of the bloodiest fighting the Canadians were to experience in the war would occur, lay squarely in the path of the Canadian advance. Only a small gap, perhaps 750 metres across, remained between its southwestern edge and the new left boundary, through which troops could be funnelled into more open terrain.

At this stage it would be useful to examine the German side of the story, for it was as much their actions as the effects of higher-level Allied planning and the harsh environmental factors that influenced the upcoming battle. On 1 October, General von Vietinghoff, commander of the Tenth Army, sent a signal to the 14th and 76th Corps saying "The Fuehrer considers it as most important to cede as little ground as possible. This applies especially to the left [Adriatic] wing of the Army. A forceful conduct of the defensive operations will be attempted."[48] In compliance with these orders, the Germans began to develop a series of defensive lines spanning the width of Italy; the first of these was the Bernhard Line, which on the Adriatic front was based on the Sangro River. One month later, Marshal Kesselring issued his "Order for the Conduct of the Campaign," in which he directed von Vietinghoff to "decisively defend the Bernhard position…Construction…must be continued by night and by day and…be improved ceaselessly. The object is to create an impregnable system of positions in depth…"[49] It was this type of linear defence system that the British and Canadians confronted in early December 1943.

The Germans were not fooled by Montgomery's attempt to use XIII Corps to divert their attention away from the Adriatic. It was obvious to Kesselring that the only place the Eighth Army could hope to achieve any significant results would be along the Adriatic coast, and in the event of a coordinated attack involving the Fifth Army to take Rome, it was equally evident that the key to frustrating the Allied plan would be to hold the British.[50] Further, the enemy had learned to recognize the signs of an impending Eighth Army offensive. At 1710 hours on 18 November, von

Photo by F.G. Whitcombe, LAC PA 113487

Photo by F.G. Whitcombe, LAC PA 167913

The impact of the fierce fighting to cross the Moro River can be seen in this series of photos taken in San Leonardo on 10 December 1943. **Left**: The stress of combat is evident on the faces of these soldiers from the Edmonton Regiment. **Right**: Major Roy C.H. Durnford, a chaplain, conducts a burial service. Some of the men wear helmets due to the heavy shelling still occurring in the area.

Vietinghoff cabled Kesselring, "The concentration of Eighth Army on the Adriatic front leads 10 Army to expect an early attack on our left wing;" almost immediately, the sector was reinforced with three additional divisions.[51] Thus, when Operation Encroach began in the latter half of November 1943, the Germans were ready, and there was virtually no chance of the Allies, or the Canadians, catching them unawares.

Within the Canadian sector, the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division (90th Pz Gren Div) took over from the worn-out 65th Infantry Division on 2 December. Its appreciation of the tactical situation deduced the objectives that an attacker would want to seize, and, using the terrain to best advantage, developed a defensive plan. The Germans dug in as they were conditioned by the consistent use of massed artillery and air power by the Allies to support ground operations.[52] In particular, the Germans made good use of "reverse slope" positions, which meant that they dug into the lower portion of both slopes of the various gullies and valleys. This tactic protected the defenders from artillery and air attack, gave them the ability to ambush any attacking force breaking the ridgelines, and concealed them from dismounted reconnaissance patrols.[53] By the time 1st Cdn Div arrived at the Moro River, the Germans were covering the most likely avenues of approach in well dug-in positions.

Both Alexander and Montgomery knew of the Germans' intentions almost immediately, having received high-priority Ultra decrypts from British Intelligence.[54] Vokes and his divisional staff, on the other hand, were not so well informed, although they were aware that the enemy had been preparing reverse slope positions in the area.[55] The explanation for what might seem a serious communication failure was simple. Intelligence gained through Ultra was very highly classified and was distributed only to a select number of Allied commanders. As one of the few officers privy to the Ultra secret, Montgomery could not do or say anything that might risk exposing its existence.[56] There is no evidence that he warned his divisional commanders of the changed enemy plans, for indeed the various intelligence staffs within 1st Cdn Div continued to assume that the enemy would act in the way they had always done. As the 2nd CIB intelligence officer, Captain F.N. Pope, noted on 10 October, "The enemy continues to withdraw slowly but surely along the whole Allied front, and it is doubtful whether this withdrawal will slow down unless KESSELRING receives reinforcements."[57]

The stiff resistance encountered by the British at the Sangro at the end of November seems to have provided the first real indication that the enemy's defensive approach had changed. But, as the Canadian division's intelligence summaries

and the Brigade war diaries clearly indicate, it was realized only gradually that the Germans intended to stand and fight. As Major N.L.C. Mathers, a divisional intelligence staff officer, wrote on 7 December:

> We have assumed that the enemy will fight his force with determination until it is clear that we have succeeded in seizing a brhd [bridgehead] which allows the full employment of all our arms and have sup [supply] routes which wipe out the river as a tactical feature. When he judges that point has been reached he will begin withdrawal to a new line. It appears that the enemy does not think that point has as yet been reached.[58]

A week later, on 14 December, the war diarist of 2nd CIB noted:

> The enemy picture has now become somewhat clearer…It is apparent that having committed all available tps [troops] of 90th PG [Panzer Grenadier] Div including the Recce Unit, Engrs [Engineers], and the "Kitchen Sink." [sic] He has now given depth to his def [defence] by reinforcing them with the [3rd] Para Regt and withdrawing certain elements of the 90th PG Div from the fwd [forward] posns [positions].[59]

It was not until 16 December 1943, during the battle for the Gully, that the divisional intelligence staff finally concluded that "no longer was the German executing a fighting withdrawal: he was resolved, cost what it might, to prevent an adv [advance] across the MORO River."[60] Eleven days later, 1st Cdn Div Intelligence Summary No. 31 repeated this gloomy assessment, noting "the unique concentration of 1 Para Div as a force betrays the resolution of the Germans to defeat our attacks along the coast if they possibly can. There are no better German tps [troops] in this theatre than our present enemy."[61] It would seem evident that it was the Canadians who were surprised at the Moro, not the Germans.

Vokes had "little scope for finesse" due to the lack of surprise, the enemy's domination of the most likely approaches, the limitations on manoeuvre resulting from Lieutenant-General Allfrey's boundary shift, and the soggy terrain.[62] Nowhere was this more in evidence than during the bloody slogging match that occurred in front of the Gully. Spanning virtually the entire breadth of 1st Cdn Div's sector and blocking all access to the "Cider" crossroads, the Gully was representative of the Germans' skill in defensive operations. It was both a reverse slope position and a natural tank obstacle. Covered in well-developed vineyards and olive groves, the German defences were further enhanced by a liberal use of both anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. Initially manned by a battalion of the 90th Pz Gren Div, this battle-depleted unit was replaced on 12 December by the 3rd Parachute Regiment (3rd Para Regt), part of the elite 1st Parachute Division (1st Para Div), which positioned one battalion near Casa Berardi at the south-western end of the Gully and another immediately in front of "Cider."[63] Clearly, the Germans intended to use the Gully to stop the Canadian advance, and it proved to be a very tough nut for 1st Cdn Div to crack.

The fight for the Gully was one of the most controversial aspects of Vokes' handling of the battles of December 1943. There were two possible courses of action open to him – blast through it or go around it. Initially Vokes chose the first option, a decision that the late historian Brereton Greenhous derided as being that of someone who was not "a moderately clever general."[64] Greenhous, however, ignored the fact that virtually nothing was known about the Gully beforehand. On the Canadian maps this feature appeared as little more than a thin line and was seen as just another minor obstacle.[65] Although Vokes knew that the Germans were using reverse slope positions, there was no reason to believe that this particular one had been transformed into a main defensive position, and thus it appears that he did not order a thorough reconnaissance of the ground beyond the Moro prior to his troops moving out from the bridgehead at San Leonardo. This was contrary to the normal Eighth Army practice. When the Loyal Edmonton Regiment "bumped" into the Gully on 10 December on its way to the "Cider" crossroads, Vokes' main objective, the resulting storm of gunfire came as a rude shock.[66]

Doug Delaney has convincingly argued that the failure of 2nd CIB's initial attack at the Gully was a product of haste.[67] It is a crucial point, for the success of Operation Encroach hinged on preventing the Germans from deploying their reserves in time to block the attack, which meant that the attackers had to move swiftly. Of course, the combined effects of the rugged terrain, adverse weather, and the German decision to stand and fight made achieving a rapid advance virtually impossible, but that did

not stop Montgomery from demanding that his subordinates pick up the pace, an effect which rippled down the line – "Montgomery harried Allfrey; Allfrey harried Vokes; and Vokes harried Hoffmeister into attacking without the benefit of extensive reconnaissance."[68] For the Canadians at the Moro, the old military adage that "time spent on recce is seldom wasted" was thus rapidly revised to "time spent on recce is seldom." This new reality affected all levels of military operations. Farley Mowat, then the Hasty Pee intelligence officer, remembered that he was given only one hour on 5 December to find a crossing site over the Moro, while Strome Galloway, an RCR company commander, later noted that he had "about two minutes to memorize the features on the [air] photo" prior to his unit's ill-fated attack across the front of the German lines on the 7th.[69]

Chris Vokes operated under similar constraints. The Army commander even used one of his liaison officers, Canadian Major Richard Malone, to apply the pressure:

> Sometimes, partly to kid Chris Vokes and also have him press ahead, Monty would have me ask Chris why the 1st Division didn't straighten out their front line a bit in the mountains. What was delaying him? This would enrage Chris, who would roar at me through his great red moustache. "You tell Monty if he would get the hell up here and see the bloody mud he has stuck us in, he'd know damn well why we can't move faster."[70]

Operating within this type of command environment, and believing that the Gully was just another small obstacle of little consequence, it seems unlikely that Vokes would have requested a delay to allow time for a detailed reconnaissance. It seems equally improbable that either Allfrey or Montgomery would have approved. Vokes' initial failure to appreciate the strength of the enemy position at the Gully might be excused.

Mark Zuehlke's charge that Vokes mishandled his division during this stage of the fighting largely stemmed from the fact that after 2nd CIB's failure on 10 December, he continued to hammer away at the Gully, frequently committing a battalion instead of a brigade. It made little tactical sense, for as the regimental history of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment wryly put it, "The line of advance manifestly was not across The Gully."[71] And yet, that was precisely what was attempted. During the next nine days, a total of eight attacks at the battalion level or higher were thrown headlong at the Gully. Each attack failed miserably, and casualties mounted.[72]

Chris Vokes later said that his intention was to use feint attacks in order to wear the enemy down, having noticed the Germans' tendency to mount immediate counter-attacks after a Canadian action. This justification, however, has never been very satisfactory, for it does not appear to be substantiated by corroborating evidence.[73] There are several other possible explanations. At this stage of the battle it was assumed that the enemy would defend briefly and then withdraw to their next holding position. It may have seemed to Vokes that "just one more try" would convince the Germans to do what they were "supposed" to do. Also, the small gap between the south-western end of the Gully and the division's left boundary, a product of the reduced divisional frontage, may have been seen as just enough of a choke point that the idea of using it to outflank the Germans was not an obvious solution to the problem. In this regard, there appears to be no evidence that 1st Cdn Div ever requested a re-adjustment of the boundary. Vokes simply "got on with it."[74]

Vokes was new to his job as divisional commander, which may help to explain his piecemeal commitment of his battalions at the Gully. Further, Vokes at this stage in his career tended to allow his brigadiers to conduct their own operations, rather than compelling them to conform to a divisional plan.[75] Chris Vokes later justified this approach, saying that he initially believed "commanding the division could be rather difficult…because I wouldn't be able to impose my will on the brigade commanders, so recently my peers…I decided I would use as much tact as possible and handle them with kid gloves."[76] Simply put, he needed to learn how to do his new job. This was not unusual, as Field Marshal Montgomery wrote in his memoirs:

> It is sometimes thought that when an officer is promoted to the next higher command, he needs no teaching in how to handle it. This is a great mistake. There is a tremendous difference between a brigade and a division…; when an officer got promotion, he needed help and advice in his new job and it was up to me to see that he got it.[77]

Montgomery makes an excellent point, one that has often been overlooked by those

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The Gully was finally captured by the Canadians after Major Paul Triquet (**Above**) led a company from the Royal 22nd Régiment to capture and hold Casa Beradi, eventually forcing a German withdrawal to Ortona.
Left: *Casa Beradi, Southern Exposure*, by Charles Comfort

unfamiliar with the complexities of battlefield command. Viewed from this perspective, it seems logical that Vokes' newness to divisional command meant that he was bound to make mistakes, and committing his battalions in a piecemeal fashion was certainly one. Some of Vokes' critics also seem to have forgotten that he was not the first Canadian general to do this. At the battle of Nissoria in Sicily, his predecessor as GOC 1st Cdn Div, Major-General Guy Simonds, had committed exactly the same error, with similar results. Montgomery recognized this as inexperience, and rather than firing him he taught the Canadian how to lead his division. Simonds went on to command II Canadian Corps and is generally regarded by historians and soldiers alike as the best field general Canada produced during the war. If Simonds needed time to adjust to his new responsibilities, so too did Vokes.[78]

Ultimately, it was by using the small gap at the southwestern end of the Gully that the stalemate was finally broken. On 14 December, "C" Company of the Royal 22e Régiment (R22eR, also known as "the Van Doos"), accompanied by tanks of the Ontario Regiment, advanced and took Casa Berardi, a house beside the Ortona–Orsogna road. From this position the Canadians could fire at the backs of the Germans in the Gully, who reacted by launching repeated counterattacks.[79] Vokes reinforced the success gained by the Van Doos, and subsequent attacks eventually resulted in the seizure of the "Cider" crossroads, which forced the enemy to abandon the Gully, opening the road to Ortona. The R22eR company commander at Casa Berardi, Captain Paul Triquet, was later awarded the Victoria Cross for his leadership.

The tactical problem that Vokes would face in Ortona was entirely different from that of the Gully. Fighting in a built-up area involved close-quarter combat. The distance between combatants was often measured in feet and the infantry could not rely on the usual range of fire support provided by artillery or aircraft. Similarly, while tanks could blast entry holes into buildings, they were very vulnerable to destruction. The German defenders, comprising two battalions of 1st Para Div plus elements of the 1st Parachute Combat Engineer Battalion, were fully aware of this, and had begun their preparations a few days before the Canadians entered the town. They demolished buildings, which offered them innumerable, well-concealed firing positions, and used the narrow, rubble-choked streets to channel their opponents into pre-designated killing zones.[80] The result was a defender's dream, and an attacker's nightmare. As Chris Vokes later said, "Everything before Ortona was a nursery tale."[81]

The vicious street fighting in Ortona, remembered by many Canadians as "the Christmas battle," has captured the attention of historians and the public alike. Vokes' decision

to push the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the Seaforth Highlanders into the town on 20 December has been severely criticized. After all, towns were typically bypassed because fighting in such an environment could slow down an army's rate of advance. Brereton Greenhous, no admirer of Vokes, has argued that this was what should have happened. According to him, the reason that it did not was that "in a very humdrum way, taking Ortona itself was the next logical step; Ortona, after all, was the immediate, direct objective, and to push on north required a small leap of logic."[82] Some veterans have agreed. Jim Stone, a major with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment who distinguished himself in the street fighting, later said, "Ortona was a frightfully-fought battle. It should never have been fought."[83]

From the vantage point of hindsight, Ortona probably should have been bypassed entirely but, at the time, no one on the Allied side, let alone Chris Vokes or his staff, had any inkling that the Germans would stand and fight. They expected a staged withdrawal to the Arielli River, the next natural obstacle.[84] It was possible that they might put up a brief fight in Ortona, a scenario that had occurred several times before in Italy. After the experience of the previous two weeks of hard fighting at and beyond the Moro River, such a view may seem incredible to a modern-day observer. However, the simple fact was that nowhere in the Allied experience in the Mediterranean had there ever been an instance in which the Germans had fought a protracted urban battle.[85] As Hoffmeister, who was given the task of taking the town, later said "I never questioned it at the time. I was given my orders and we got on with it."[86]

The Germans were also surprised at how the battle for Ortona developed. On 25 December Field Marshal Kesselring discussed the matter on the telephone with Colonel-General Joachim Lemelsen, acting commander of Tenth Army, saying that "It is clear that we do not want to defend Ortona decisively but the English have made it appear as important as Rome…you can do nothing when things develop in this manner; it is only too bad that…the world press makes so much of [it]."[87] Kesselring was correct in noting that the media spotlight had shifted to the Adriatic front. On 22 December, an Associated Press reporter described Ortona as a "miniature Stalingrad," an image that was immediately seized upon: in Canada, practically every newspaper in the country provided daily coverage, while CBC radio correspondent Matthew Halton offered several gripping frontline reports.[88] With this type of attention, Ortona became "a prestige battle," one that neither side was willing to abandon. It was a powerful indication of how the media could influence the conduct of military operations.

It is sometimes overlooked that at the same time that the street fighting in Ortona was going on, Vokes was pushing the bulk of his division – both the 1st and 3rd Brigades – north and west of the town to cut off the coastal highway, thereby forcing the Germans to withdraw. One could reasonably argue that this operation was Vokes' main effort, and that perhaps he did make that "small leap of logic" Greenhous referred to.[89] This outflanking move through soggy terrain was also hotly contested by 1st Para Div and the rate of advance was very slow. While Vokes undoubtedly had to focus on this fight, he still kept his eye on the 2nd Brigade. Increasingly worried about its mounting casualties – Major Stone's rifle company was reduced to 18 men by the end of the week[90] – Vokes visited Hoffmeister on "about day four or five" to discuss breaking off the battle. Hoffmeister later recalled that,

> I could see light at the end of the tunnel. Chris Vokes asked me if I would like to quit and I said, "absolutely not, to quit at this time would be letting the brigade down and the effect on the morale of the brigade would be such that it would be just shocking." Furthermore the objective was represented to me as being *extremely* important, one that Eighth Army just must have, and I said nothing has changed as far as 2nd Brigade is concerned[;] we'll see it through, which we did.[91]

Vokes accepted this argument, and 2nd CIB continued to fight its way through the town. By 28 December the rest of 1st Cdn Div was close enough to Highway 16 to directly threaten its continued use by the Germans, who withdrew from Ortona the same day. Shortly afterward, in early January 1944, the Eighth Army attack finally petered out due to the combined effects of poor weather and heavy losses. The Canadians' ordeal at the Moro River and Ortona was over.

* * * * *

Since December 1943, there has been considerable debate regarding what was actually gained during the battles of the Moro

River and Ortona. The Canadian official history has recorded them as costly successes, while Vokes reported to his superiors that, "We smashed the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division and we gave the 1st German Parachute Division a mauling which it will long remember."[92] On the other hand, Ortona's port facility turned out to be more or less useless for the purpose of military logistics due to its small size and limited infrastructure.[93] More significantly, after abandoning Ortona the Germans simply withdrew as they had been expected to, and occupied a new line of defence along the Arielli River. The Adriatic front quickly settled into a state of static warfare, with little movement before the Canadians left in the spring of 1944 to participate in an attack at the Liri Valley. From this viewpoint, the ground that had been won at such high cost appeared to provide the Allies with little real advantage.

For the veterans and the families of those who died, the appalling human cost of these battles has been the greatest cause for criticism. The casualty figures tell the grim story. In September, 1st Cdn Div's battle casualties had been 69 all ranks.[94] In December this figure skyrocketed to a staggering 3,956 officers and men – 2,339 killed, wounded or missing, and another 1,617 listed as either sick or suffering from neuro-psychiatric disorders.[95] The rifle companies in the Division's nine infantry battalions, which seldom had a total fighting strength exceeding 3,600 men, suffered the most. Many lost 50 percent or more of their men, including a high percentage of platoon or section commanders. Even after having received some 2,408 replacements, 1st Cdn Div was still short 1,050 officers and men by early January 1944. Vokes believed the situation was so serious that he reported to Allfrey "in my opinion, the infantry units of this division will not be in fit condition to undertake further offensive operations until they have had a period of rest, free of operational commitments."[96]

Chris Vokes was nicknamed "The Butcher" after Ortona by some of his troops indicating that they held him personally responsible for the high casualty rate.[97] Of all the criticisms that have been levied against him, this is perhaps the most unfair, for he was not entirely to blame. After all, the rough parity in fighting strength between the Allies and the Germans ensured that the Italian campaign would be a war of attrition even before it began. As well, the Germans, unlike Vokes, were able to replace their battle-depleted units with fresh, veteran units – 90th Pz Gren Div was relieved by 1st Para Div on 12 December. Moreover, the Allies were trying to break through a main defensive position held by a highly skilled opposing force determined to contest every inch, and in the worst possible conditions. This situation was exacerbated by the slow arrival of replacements, many of which were insufficiently trained for front-line service and quickly became

Photo by T.F. Rowe, LAC PA 107935

Photo by T.F. Rowe, LAC PA 114030

Top: At the end of a slugging match a Canadian Sherman, probably from the Three Rivers Regiment, rumbles into the main square of Ortona. The fury of the fighting can be seen by the wrecked buildings.

Middle: Canadian troops move a 6-pounder anti-tank gun into position during the street fighting in Ortona, 21 December 1943.

Bottom: A column of troops from the Edmonton Regiment move up a street, supported by a tank, Ortona, 23 December 1943.

casualties themselves. Under such adverse circumstances, heavy casualties were inevitable. In fact, losses in the rest of the Army in December were comparable to those sustained by the Canadians, but only Vokes' troops had achieved anything resembling success.[98] Finally, contrary to what some of his men thought, Vokes himself was deeply affected by the high price his men paid. This was at least partly in evidence when he offered to call the battle off in Ortona. However, a more poignant indicator was related by a former 1st Cdn Div staff officer. One night during that terrible December he had discovered "Chris Vokes…having dinner all by himself in his own headquarters, and he was crying. There was only one reason he was weeping – he realized what [his] men were going through."[99]

A battlefield commander bears the responsibility for both success and failure: such is the price of command. Yet, when examining how battles are conducted, especially after the fact, it is sometimes easy to forget that commanders, despite their professional training, are still human beings who make mistakes. There is no question that during the battles of the Moro River and for Ortona, Major-General Christopher Vokes committed some errors of judgement. At the same time one cannot divorce the decision-making process from the context within which decisions are made, and thus any criticism of his generalship must be tempered by an attempt to understand that context. In his first major engagement as a divisional commander, Chris Vokes was forced to fight a battle of attrition against some of the best soldiers in the world, in terrain and weather conditions that heavily favoured the defenders. At the same time, the limitations on his freedom of action resulting from the unfortunate loss of the Villa Rogatti bridgehead and the simultaneous reduction of his division's frontage, combined with an equally unanticipated change in enemy defensive tactics, set the stage for the events at the Gully and in Ortona itself. All of these elements shaped the battle that Vokes had to direct. In the end, he could only do his best. Given the context, his best was good enough.

Notes

1. See Brereton Greenhous, "Would It Not Have Been Better to Bypass Ortona Completely?," *Canadian Defence Quarterly* (April 1989); Mike Cessford, "Hard in the Attack: The Canadian Army in Sicily and Italy, July 1943 – June 1944" (PhD dissertation, Carleton University, 1996), Douglas E. Delaney, *The Soldier's General: Bert Hoffmeister at War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), and Mark Zuehlke, *Ortona: Canada's Epic World War II Battle* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999).
2. G.W.L. Nicholson, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. Volume 2. The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955), pp.180-186.
3. *Ibid*., p.183.
4. B-GL-300-002/FP-000, *Land Force, Volume 2, Land Force Tactical Doctrine*. Ottawa: Canadian Armed Forces, Directorate of Army Doctrine, 1997, Ch.3, p.29.
5. "Document Achse", Annex C to Army Headquarters Historical Report No. 18, "The Campaign in Southern Italy (September – December 1943): Information from German Military Documents regarding Allied Operations in General and Canadian Operations in Particular," dated 1 November 1947, by A.G. Steiger, Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage.
6. The relative strengths of Allied and German forces are taken from Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: Master of the Battlefield 1942-1944* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983) pp.438-439.
7. For a description of the overall plan, see Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, p.274.
8. C.P. Stacey, Canadian Military Headquarters Historical Report No. 165, "Operations of 1 Cdn Div and 1 Cdn Armd Bde in Italy: 25 Nov 43 – 4 Jan 44," dated 27 November 1946,Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage, pp.4-9.
9. 1st Canadian Infantry Division Headquarters War Diary (General Staff), Message G107, dated 25 November 1943, 0400 hours (Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, National Defence, Series C-3, Volume 13727, Reel T-1876, Serial 2/GS). Montgomery's message may be seen at Appendix 46 to 1st Canadian Infantry Division Headquarters War Diary (General Staff), November 1943.
10. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, p.288.
11. "Undated letter from Montgomery to Brooke", quoted in Hamilton, *Master of the Battlefield*, p.451.
12. 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters War Diary, 26 November 1943 (Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, National Defence, Series C-3, Volume 14074, Reel T-11070, Serial 35).
13. Farley Mowat, *And No Birds Sang* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), pp.185-186.
14. Terry Copp, "The Battle for Ortona," in Legion Magazine, November/December 1997, in <www.legionmagazine.com/features/canadianmilitaryhistory/97-11.asp>, p.2. Also Chris Vokes, with John P. Maclean, *Vokes: My Story* (Ottawa: Gallery Books, 1985), pp.141-144.
15. Vokes was promoted to the rank of brigadier and assumed command on 24 June 1942. See C.P. Stacey, Canadian Military Headquarters Historical Report No. 78, "Situation of the Canadian Military Forces in the United Kingdom, Summer 1942," dated 31 July 1942 (Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage), p.5.
16. C.P. Stacey, Canadian Military Headquarters Historical Report No. 111, "Situation of the Canadian Military Forces Overseas, Autumn, 1943," dated 31 December

1943 (Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage), p.6. See also Vokes, *My Story*, p.134.
17. Major-General C. Vokes, CB, CBE, DSO, "Some Reflections on Operational Command," *Canadian Army Journal*, Volume 2, Number 10 (January 1949), p.9.
18. Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.178.
19. Daniel G. Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers: The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), p.190-191. See also Zuehlke, *Ortona*, p.377.
20. Denis Whitaker, in *Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), pp.97-98, has discussed the question of "when can a soldier say no?," arguing that the Canadian commander at Dieppe, Major-General Hamilton Roberts, who had doubts about its feasibility, could not have refused the order to lead the attack, for in the context of the time an order was an order, and one simply got on with it. It would seem probable that Vokes, if he had concerns about the viability of Operation Encroach, would have found himself under a similar constraint. With regard to following orders, Vokes was a strict disciplinarian. See Vokes, *My Story*, p.70.
21. Major-General C. Vokes, CB, CBE, DSO, "Crossing of the Moro and Capture of Ortona," dated March 16, 1944 (Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, National Defence, Volume 10881, Box 255), p.1.
22. Stacey, CMHQ Historical Report No.165, p.77. See also Zuehlke, *Ortona*, p.29.
23. 1st Canadian Infantry Division Headquarters War Diary (General Staff), 4 December 1943, Ops Message Log, Serial 9099, (Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, National Defence, Series C-3, Volume 13727, Reel T-1876, Serial 2/GS).
24. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, p.289.
25. David Bercuson, *The Patricias: The Proud History of a Fighting Regiment* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2001), p.202.
26. Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers*, p.156.
27. 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters War Diary, 14 December 1943 (Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, National Defence, Series C-3, Volume 14076, Reel T-11072, Serial 30). For a description of the effects the Moro battlefield had on soldiers, see Farley Mowat, *And No Birds Sang*, pp.185-217.
28. Vokes, *My Story*, p.142. See also Bercuson, *The Patricias*, p.202, and Brereton Greenhous, "Would It Not Have Been Better to Bypass Ortona Completely?," p.54.
29. Vokes, "Crossing of the Moro and Capture of Ortona," (LAC), p.1.
30. Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.95.
31. Vokes, "Crossing of the Moro and Capture of Ortona," (LAC), p.1. See also the 2nd CIB War Diary (LAC) entry for 5 December 1943, which reports that "PPCLI and SEAFORTH OF C patrols during the hrs [hours] of darkness searched the R. [River] Moro extensively for inf [infantry] and tk [tank] crossings…accompanied by engr [engineer] reps…
32. Arnold Warren, *Wait for the Waggon: The Story of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps* (Canada: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1961), p.240.
33. Vokes, "Crossing of the Moro and Capture of Ortona," p.1. In the 1st CIB War Diary, 5 December 1943, notes from oral orders by the brigade commander, Brigadier Howard Graham, identifies the task of "Feint attack by 1 CIB with 1 Sqn [squadron] Tanks at mouth of Moro on coastal rd [road]." Also Bercuson, *The Patricias*, p.203; and 2nd CIB War Diary, 5 Dec 1943.
34. Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.95.
35. Vokes, "Crossing of the Moro and Capture of Ortona," p.2.
36. Cessford, "Hard in the Attack," pp.252-253.
37. 2nd CIB War Diary, 6 Dec 1943.
38. Copp, "The Battle for Ortona," p.4.
39. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, p.297.
40. Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers*, p.159.
41. 3rd Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers War Diary, December 1943 (Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, National Defence, Series C, Volume 14711, Reels T18342 - T-18343, Serial 24), and Headquarters, 1st Divisional Engineers, Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers, December 1943 (Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, National Defence, Series C-3, Volume 14691, Reels T18315 – T-18317, Serial 21).
42. Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.95.
43. Land Force Tactical Doctrine, p.34.
44. Strome Galloway, *Bravely Into Battle: The Autobiography of a Canadian Soldier in World War Two* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1988), p.163.
45. Cessford, "Hard in the Attack," p.222.
46. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, p.297.
47. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, Lynton Hudson, trans., *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Kesselring* (London: William Kimber & Co., 1953), pp.184-187.
48. Signal from AOK 10 Army (von Vietinghoff) to 14 and 76 Corps dated 1 October 1943, in "Information from German Military Documents" (Steiger Report No.18), pp.35-36.
49. "Order for the Conduct of the Campaign," Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, dated 1 November 1943, Appendix "L" to "Information from German Military Documents" (Steiger Report No. 18), p.193.
50. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, p.287. Also Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.90.
51. AOK 10 Army (von Vietinghoff) to OB South (Kesselring), 1710 hours, 18 Nov 1943, "Information from German Military Documents" (Steiger Report No. 18), p.71.
52. "Information from German Military Documents" (Steiger Report No. 18), p.83.
53. Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.98.
54. Copp, "The Battle for Ortona," p.2, and Ralph Bennett, *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1989), p.251. According to Bennett (p.414), Montgomery, as GOC of Eighth Army, had been aware of ULTRA since the Battle of El Alamein.
55. This information came from the V Corps Intelligence Summaries. See Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, p.290.
56. Bennett, *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy*, pp.413-4.
57. 2nd CIB War Diary, Oct 1943.
58. "1 Cdn Div Intelligence Summary No. 28, dated 7 December 1943", by Major N.L.C. Mathers (GS, 1 Cdn Div), copy in 2nd CIB War Diary, December 1943.
59. 2nd CIB War Diary, 14 Dec 1943.
60. "1 Cdn Div Intelligence Summary No. 29", dated 16 Dec 1943, by Major N.L.C. Mathers (GS, 1 Cdn Div), copy in 2nd CIB War Diary, December 1943.
61. "1 Cdn Div Intelligence Summary No. 31", dated 27 Dec 1943, by Lieutenant-Colonel C.M. Harding (GS 1 Cdn Div), copy in 2nd CIB War Diary, December 1943.
62. Cessford, "Hard in the Attack," p.218.
63. "Information from German Military Documents" (Steiger Report No. 18), p.93.

64. Greenhous, "Would It Not Have Been Better to Bypass Ortona Completely?", p.52.
65. Zuehlke, *Ortona*, p.166.
66. Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.97.
67. *Ibid*., p.99.
68. *Ibid*.
69. Mowat, *And No Birds Sang*, p.189. Galloway, *Bravely Into Battle*, p.161.
70. Richard S. Malone, *A Portrait of War, 1939-1943* (Don Mills, Ontario: Collins, 1983), p.214. See also Vokes, *My Story*, p.141.
71. G.R. Stevens, *A City Goes to War* (Brampton, Ontario: Charters, 1964), p.269.
72. Greenhous, "Would It Not Have Been Better to Bypass Ortona Completely?", p.52.
73. Vokes, *My Story*, pp.140-144. The 1st Cdn Div War Diary for December 1943 does not substantiate this position.
74. E-mail, Major Douglas Delaney to author, Saturday 4 March 2006, 2140 hours.
75. Cessford, "Hard in the Attack," p.262.
76. Vokes, *My Story*, p.140.
77. Montgomery of Alamein, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Montgomery*, p.85. The difference in scale Montgomery refers to is considerable: a Canadian infantry brigade comprised three battalions with a fighting strength of about 3,000 men, while a division had three brigades as well as integral artillery, engineer, and logistic support, totalling just over 17,000 troops. See 1st Canadian Infantry Division Headquarters War Diary (Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General), December 1943, "Consolidated Fighting Strength, 0600 hrs, 01 Dec 1943" (Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, National Defence, Series C-3, Volume 13740, Reel T-7601, Serial 2/A & Q).
78. Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers*, pp.80-81.
79. Nicholson, The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945, pp.310-2.
80. "Information from German Military Documents" (Steiger Report No. 18), p.106. For a detailed description of the fighting from the German point of view, see also Carl Bayerlein, trans. by Alex McQuarrie; edited by Dean F. Oliver, "Parachute Engineers in Combat, Ortona, 1943: A German Perspective," in *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1999), pp.47-50.
81. Major-General Chris Vokes, quoted in Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers*, p.175.
82. Greenhous, "Would It Not Have Been Better to Bypass Ortona Completely?", p.54.
83. Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers*, p.190.
84. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, p.321. Also Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.100.
85. Stacey, CMHQ Historical Report No. 165, p.183.
86. Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.100.
87. "Information from German Military Documents" (Steiger Report No. 18), p.108.
88. The AP comment is quoted in Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, p.328. For Canadian newspaper coverage, see Canadian War Museum, "Democracy at War: Canadian Newspapers and the Second World War," <www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/newspapers/aboutarchives_e.html>. For information regarding CBC Radio correspondence from the frontlines, see A.E. Powley, *Broadcast From the Front: Canadian Radio Overseas in the Second World War* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1975). Transcripts of Matthew Halton's radio broadcasts from Italy are available at the CBC website.
89. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, pp.324-325. Only the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and "C" Company of the Seaforth Highlanders were initially sent into Ortona. The rest of the Seaforths joined in on 21 December once Brigadier Hoffmeister realized taking the town would be a major task. The PPCLI remained outside of the town on the north side of the Gully to protect the open flank.
90. Bill McAndrew, *Canadians and the Italian Campaign, 1943-1945* (Montreal: Editions art global, 1996), p.79.
91. McAndrew/Greenhous interview with Major-General Bert Hoffmeister, quoted in Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.104.
92. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, p.339. Vokes, "Crossing of the Moro and Capture of Ortona," p.6.
93. Greenhous, "Would It Not Have Been Better to Bypass Ortona Completely?", p.51. Also Delaney, *The Soldier's General*, p.100.
94. "Consolidated Fighting State for Month of September 1943," Appendix 4 to 1st Canadian Infantry Division Headquarters War Diary (Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General), September 1943.
95. Major-General Vokes to Lieutenant-General Allfrey, "Fighting State – 1 Cdn Div as of 2 Jan 44", Appendix B to Stacey, CMHQ Historical Report No. 165, pp.229 - 231. Neuro-psychiatric cases were not specifically identified in Vokes' report. However, Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew have recorded that between 7 and 21 December, the division psychiatrist saw about 350 cases. See Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Montreal: McGill – Queen's University Press, 1990), p.56.
96. Vokes, "Fighting State – 1 Cdn Div as of 2 Jan 44", in CMHQ Historical Report No. 165, pp.229-231.
97. Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers*, p.191.
98. For a description of the Canadian reinforcement system in place during the battles of the Moro River and Ortona, see C.P. Stacey, Canadian Military Headquarters Historical Report No. 166, "Administrative Aspects of the Operations of 1 Cdn Div in Italy, December 1943,"dated 29 November 1946 (Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage). For the Division's opinion of the quality of replacement infantrymen, see Vokes, "Fighting State – 1 Cdn Div as of 2 Jan 44", in CMHQ Historical Report No. 165, p.231. For Eighth Army casualties, see Hamilton, *Monty: Master of the Battlefield*, p.464, who reports Montgomery's concern that given the severe casualties 8th Indian Division had suffered, it would have to be taken out of the line.
99. Dancocks, *The D-Day Dodgers*, p.191.

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