



The Museum of the Battle of Ortona was founded in 2002 by the Municipal Administration not to forget the events that characterized the city during the winter of 1943, when German and Canadian soldiers faced each other here.

## **THE BATTLE OF ORTONA**

First German soldiers came to Ortona on the day after the King and principal government officials, who had embarked on the corvette "Baionetta", fled to Brindisi. It's September 10th, 1943, and the Wehrmacht soldiers begin to look for strategic points from which to organize the defense of the city, while the engineers mine the piers of the port to let them blow up, making them unavailable to the Allied troops who are approaching from the south. With the arrival of the winter the Allied military operations suffer from the difficulties caused by the climate on a difficult ground, where the rivers are in flood and the fields are completely flooded and impracticable for the mechanized means of transportation. The ford of the Moro River, near Ortona, takes place with great difficulty: it rains in torrents for days and the river is swollen and impetuous. On December 8th, Canadian troops finally cross the river and reach the center of Rogatti. The next day also San Leonardo falls and the forces of Vokes head for Ortona, but first of all they must cross a crossroads called "Cider", located astride the Maruccina road. It is very important, because from there you can easily get into town; everything is done easily and without resistance from German soldiers, but it is a tragic mistake, in reality they have only reached another crossroads along the way of the that road. General Vokes decides to change strategy and to point on a side street that runs alongside a farmhouse, Casa Berardi, far from the "Cider" only 1200 meters. The goal is conquered after a bloody fight: now it's the turn of Ortona.

The soldiers of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment come easily to the gates of the city, only meeting with a sporadic and weak resistance from German soldiers. Company "C" of Seaforth engages in a hard battle in the south-east of the city in an attempt to free the church of Santa

Maria of Constantinopoli and on the same evening the first Canadian patrols point towards Corso Vittorio Emanuele. At this point the deadly German tactics appears in all its evidence: every house has been mined and paratroopers hold out in some key points in order to direct Canadian soldiers along the main street of the city; the job of Canadian soldiers is to cut a way house by house. Only on December 28th the troops of the 1st Division of General Vokes, manage to get the better of German soldiers who start to withdraw to the area of the castle, leaving the town in the hands of Canadian troops.

Ortona is a pile of rubbles, the 80% of its territory has been destroyed.

The city, for the resistance shown during that period, and for its 1314 civilian casualties, has received the gold medal for civic valour.

## **THE MUSEUM OF THE BATTLE**

The museum has three rooms.

The first room, called "Hall of civilians," has lots of photos, testimonies of that period. A plastic model shows what happened in the center of Ortona. As Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, told "it was the first big street-fighting battle, and much was learned from it." Ortona is called "Little Stalingrad" or "Stalingrad of Italy" because the Germans used here the same tactics that they had suffered in the Russian city by the local population.

A big picture shows the destruction of the Cathedral of St. Thomas, the patron saint of the town.

The second room is the one of the protagonists of the battle, the "Hall of combatants," both veterans and civilians have contributed to it, with the donation of war objects and other ones, also found in the surrounding countryside, the scene/theatre of fighting until June 1944. Some maps at the back of a second plastic model explain the military tactics used during the battle.

The third room, with pictures and stories of war, shows another important aspect of the war, the use of propaganda. There are reproductions of various newspapers of the time, which show the different stages of the battle in Ortona and all around and reproductions of notices directed to citizens by the German soldiers quartered in the town. Inside the third room there is the "prayer room" with a Bible placed on a lectern for those people who want to meditate reading some passage.