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The Hasty Pees in Sicily

**Account given by Major A. R. Campbell Officer Commanding
'A' Company and Captain N. R. Waugh, MC, Officer
Commanding 'D' Company, Hastings & Prince Edward
Regiment, on 18 August 1943, at Battalion Rest Area near
MILITELLO in val di CATANIA, SICILY**

The Commander's intention for the initial assault landing on SUGAR beach was as follows: 'B' and 'C' Companies were to make the initial assault, 'D' Company was to act as support company and 'A' Company was to act as floating reserve. The Officer Commanding, Lieutenant-Colonel B. A. Sutcliffe, DSO, ED, was to land with 'B' Company on the right and 'C' Company on the left to secure the beach for about 500 yards and then to put in 'D' Company to knock out enemy machine gun posts on the left. If these operations were successful 'A' Company was to push through and move inland about 1 1/8 miles and seize the feature overlooking the coast. The battalion was then to re-organize and capture PACHINO Airport. Because of last minute information concerning the nature and condition of the shoreline this plan had to be altered accordingly and to some extent it caused confusion. In the altered plan 'B' Company was to proceed ashore in DUKWS in order to pass over deep water and a false beach (sandbar) that last minute information had disclosed. 'C' Company was to continue according to the original plan. There was in existence an alternate plan should last minute arrangements break down. As events turned out it was not necessary to use this alternative plan.

'B' and 'C' Companies got on to the beach with little or no opposition. 'D' Company was landed according to the Commanding Officer's plan. 'A' Company and Battalion HQ, however, were side-tracked due to faulty navigation and were landed about 500 yards off their mark on 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade's front. There they met some slight opposition and the battalion suffered its first casualty when Company Sergeant Major Nutley, was killed by a sniper. However, very little

opposition was encountered and 'A' Company landed, cleared out several enemy posts and proceeded inland some four or five miles. On proceeding inland this company encountered a small Italian artillery detachment. This they shot up and captured one gun and the gun team together with ammunition. By this time the company contacted Battalion HQ and joined the battalion after proceeding across the country.

In the meanwhile the battalion had re-organized and captured positions around the airport and occupied it. During this engagement Sergeant Lawson of 'C' Company was killed and Lieutenant Leith-Scott was seriously wounded. That evening the battalion went to its assembly area and took up a defensive position. An enemy counter attack was expected but this did not materialize and on 11 July at about 1200 hours we moved to another assembly area and from there commenced the advance to ROSOLINI which had been subjected to considerable shelling from Naval guns. After a long march which was particularly trying to the troops since they had all been aboard ship for about a month and were, therefore, still soft, to which was added the almost unbearable heat and the weight of the ammunition which they were carrying, we nevertheless reached ROSOLINI without loss of men at about 2300 hours that night. When we arrived there we found that elements of the 48 Highlanders and the Royal Canadian Regiment had cleared the town of enemy and so we proceeded to a bivouac area where we took up defensive positions in front of the town and at 0500 hours, 12 July, made ready to continue our advance with the other battalions in the brigade and was in this instance loaned to the Royal Canadian Regiment. The battalion, therefore, moved off on foot to a point 15 miles



Canadian troops land in Sicily, 10 July 1943.

north and went into another assembly area which the Royal Canadian Regiment had cleaned out but met with no opposition.

At 1800 hours that evening the battalion moved off mounted on tanks from the 12 Canadian Tank Regiment with 'A' Company as advance guard and arrived at GIARATANNA where no enemy was encountered. Although we had been prepared for a fight we found instead a gala reception awaiting us with scores of Italians waiting to be captured. During this time 1 Canadian Division took over the vanguard from 51 (Highland) Division. On 14 July the battalion, assembled with other units, was visited by Lieutenant-General Sir B.L. Montgomery, who in his talk to the troops complimented us on our showing to date and said that he knew we would perform all the tasks allotted to us. At 2000 hours with 'B' Company as the vanguard company the battalion moved off mounted on motor transport and tanks in the following order: 'A' Company, self-propelled artillery, Battalion HQ, 'D' Company and 'C' Company and at 0105 hours reached a bivouac area some two or three miles south of VIZZINI

from which firing could be heard. The town of VIZZINI had been attacked by the 51 (Highland) Division and by first light the town was reported cleared and we were ordered to pass through it as the Divisional vanguard. At 0800 hours, 15 July, an enemy lorry was observed proceeding down the road in the vicinity of GRAMMICHELE. This truck was destroyed by elements of 'B' Company who were then the battalion vanguard. At 0900 hours the battalion passed over the high ground outside of GRAMMICHELE and ran into heavy enemy fire which included 88 and 75 mm guns and also 20 mm machine guns. From this fire we suffered the loss of the following: two ammunition lorries, two carriers, a 17-pounder anti-tank gun (from 51 (Highland) Division Anti-Tank Regiment), two tanks and four recce carriers of the Saskatoon Light Infantry. The battalion then deployed with 'A' Company as fire company, and 'C' and 'D' Companies, with one battery of self-propelled guns under command made a flanking attack into the town of GRAMMICHELE. 'B' Company succeeded in getting into the town after making a right flanking attack. By noon the town was cleared of enemy and the battalion

consolidated. Among enemy losses were two four-barreled self-propelled light 20 mm flak guns (of which one was intact and taken over by us), two Mk IV and a Mk III tank and one small Italian tank. Ammunition stores were also captured. At 1330 hours a heavy artillery barrage was laid down by Divisional artillery to the north of the town which completed the rout of the enemy.

At 1800 hours, 16 July, the battalion moved off on transport continuing its advance north and at 2145 hours we took up defensive positions in an orchard just south of PIAZZA ARMERINA.

At 0800 hours, 17 July, the battalion was placed on one half hour's notice to move and orders were received for the battalion to advance at 1230 hours. At 1400 hours we moved down from PIAZZA ARMERINA and halted at point 350685 for the evening meal.

2 CIB had been held up by heavy enemy opposition between PIAZZA ARMERINA and VALGUERNERA and instructions were issued to the battalion to carry out a night attack on the town of VALGUERNERA. The battalion moved off to an assembly area in square 3568. The attack commenced at 2130 hours, 17 July, with the battalion disposed in the following battle order: 'A' Company as the vanguard followed by Battalion HQ, 'C' Company, 'B' Company and 'D' Company. These in turn were followed by mortars and carriers. This area was extremely mountainous and the ground in this area was interspersed with deep ravines and dried up water courses and the only available roads were goat-paths along the sides of the mountains. 'A' Company managed to find a suitable goat-path and proceeded along it. Since the nature of the

ground was such that carriers could not follow them they were ordered to continue to the right of the town of VALGUERNERA whereas the carriers and mortars were ordered to proceed along a route on the left by which they were able to pass. After making difficult progress through very rough country 'A' Company reached a large farm in a valley where Lieutenant P. D'Amore, the Battalion Intelligence Officer and Interrogator, kidnapped a local farmer and forced him to show us the way into VALGUERNERA which he did and led the company to the outskirts of the town. Here Lieutenant D'Amore contacted some civilian refugees and on being grilled they revealed the position of enemy guns and billets and other valuable information.

In the meantime 'C' Company, commanded by Captain Cleworth, joined 'A' Company and they both proceeded together. After this information concerning the enemy had been received it was decided that lack of supporting arms made an attack on the enemy positions unwise. The companies thereupon dug in some 600 yards in front of the enemy guns. The companies were out of touch with Battalion HQ but they knew that the remainder of the battalion would attack the following morning and they decided to wait. At about 0700 hours the following morning, 18 July, the enemy commenced limbering up their guns and a column of infantry mounted in trucks were seen to move along the road which ran across the company's positions. They were caught by surprise with our light machine gun and rifle fire and about 90 enemy were killed of which the Company Commander of 'A' Company, Major A.R. Campbell, accounted for 18. The rest of the enemy, who had debussed and taken cover, attacked the hill upon which 'A' Company was dug

A general view of Roger and Sugar beaches, the landing sites of units of the 1st Canadian Division during the invasion of Sicily, 10 July 1943.





Photo by Frank Royal, NAC PA 166750

A section of Canadian troops in action near Valguarnera, 20 July 1943.

in. A sharp engagement ensued and the Company Commanders of both 'A' and 'C' Companies realized that their companies were in danger of being overwhelmed. Regimental Sergeant-Major Duffy, and Company Sergeant-Major Ponsford, thereupon volunteered to take back information to Battalion HQ as to the position of these companies and also their requirements of artillery support. This they did after travelling over extremely bad country, covering eight miles, and returned that morning. Considering that they had marched some thirty miles in twelve hours just previously to the engagement, it was no small feat.

As the enemy were preparing to attack, 'A' Company withdrew to another position and this move was covered by 'C' Company. The enemy strength was suspected to be in the vicinity of a battalion. They attacked and 'C' Company held them. It was during this engagement that Captain N.R. Waugh performed deeds of bravery which won him the Military Cross.

In the meanwhile 'D' and 'B' Companies moved to a high feature in 3376 with 'D' Company advancing to the road running up to the town and just south of a bridge. 'B' Company advanced towards the town itself but encountered very stiff opposition and were unable to get forward. Shortly after first light 'D' Company ambushed a number of enemy vehicles and secured a direct hit on an ammunition lorry which was carrying personnel, killing all in it by means of the PIAT mortar. This was the first time the PIAT was used and it proved most effective. One platoon of this company tried to enter the town but was forced back by fire. Another platoon, covering the bridge, was withstanding an enemy counterattack estimated at least one company. By 1200 hours the position on all fronts became untenable and

the battalion was ordered to withdraw to its original start point at the road junction.

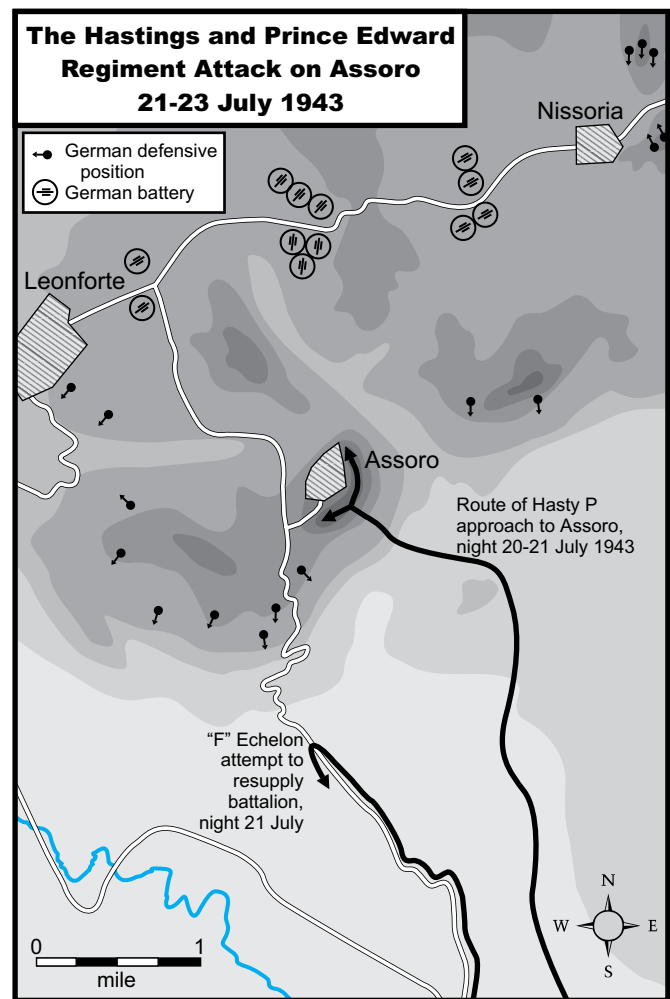
At 1300 hours, 20 July, Lt-Col B.A. Sutcliffe, DSO, ED, and the Intelligence Officer, Captain M.H.B. Cockin, went forward to make a recce of the route to attack ASSORO. Shortly afterwards these two officers were killed by

an 88 mm shell. Major the Lord Tweedsmuir who was second-in-command then took over command of the battalion and he and the Company Commanders went forward to make another recce and they picked out the route for the battalion advance.

At 2100 hours that night (20 July) the medium artillery opened fire on the crossroads beyond ASSORO and also on the lines of communication leading to the town. The entire divisional field artillery then opened fire and laid down a terrific barrage. At 2130 hours the battalion moved off led by an assault section composed of twenty of the fittest men from each company. Their armament consisted of rifles and a few Brens. They carried no equipment. Following them was the remainder of the battalion in the following order: 'A' Company, battalion HQ, 'B' Company, 'C' Company and 'D' Company. We proceeded across country instead of following the prescribed route and had to make a wide flanking movement because of daylight and thereby lost considerable time. We reached the base of our objective at about 0700 hours, 21 July, and there a hurried Company Commanders' conference was held to allot routes up the feature. The assault group was on the left with 'A' Company following and these were followed on the right by 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies. They were all to attack simultaneously. On reaching the top of the feature the battalion then took up defensive positions and opened fire on enemy transport moving along the road and knocked several of them out. 'D' Company actually moved into the town of ASSORO. The enemy counter attacked. We did likewise and soon confused fighting resulted. Eventually things quietened down and it was found that the enemy had evacuated the town leaving behind snipers with machine guns and rifles. When the sniping had died down and

all seemed quiet in the town the enemy then opened up with 105 mm mortars at about 1500 hours. These were eventually silenced by our own artillery after Major Kennedy had contacted them by means of the 46 Set. After that the enemy contented himself by harassing us by intermittent mortaring and shelling.

The town of ASSORO was built on a feature some 1500 ft above sea level and surrounded by cliffs which the enemy considered impregnable. The last 300 ft of this feature were practically vertical. We attacked from the northeast and had the enemy wanted to do so he could have made any attempt to approach the town impossible by rolling huge stones off the cliff. Since the enemy, however, was convinced in his own mind that no human could possibly scramble up these cliffs he left his defenses extremely weak on the north and northeast of the feature. We arrived on the feature and could see the Germans in the town and on the roads leading into it from the south. We brought heavy small arms to bear upon them and shot up seven of their vehicles in which they suffered many killed. It was at this point that enemy shelling caused casualties to us and our own guns eventually silenced those of the enemy after Major Kennedy from an observation post had brought down counterbattery fire and forced the enemy guns to take up another position. That



Observation Post, Assoro, Sicily by Major William Abernethy Ogilvie.

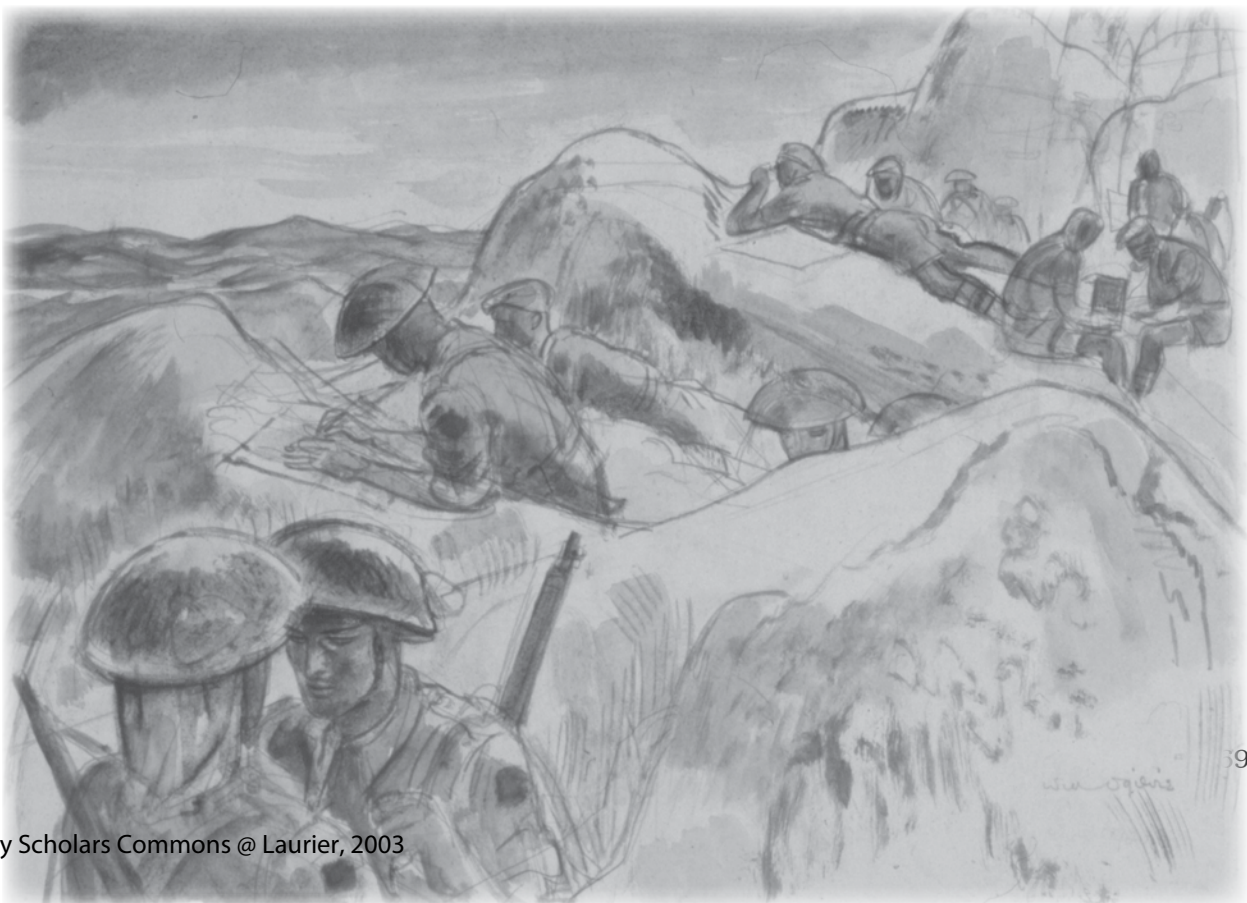




Photo by Jack H. Smith, NAC PA 166755

Canadian soldiers advancing past a Sherman tank near Valguarnera, 19 July 1943.

evening the enemy organized another attack in the town but they were once more driven out by our artillery.

During all this time and after much hard fighting the battalion ran short of rations and ammunition. Captain (now Major) W. K. Stockloser and Regimental Sergeant Major Duffy, proceeded down these precipitous cliffs, finally contacting the Royal Canadian Regiment who provided a one hundred man pack team to bring up rations and supplies and guided them back over this most difficult route without the loss of a single man.

During 22 July the battalion remained in position, buried its dead and rested. On 23 July at 1600 hours the battalion re-organized and took up a position in and about the town of ASSORO. On 24 July at 1330 hours the battalion was ordered to prepare to move and at 1500 hours moved off embussed to a position about three miles east of LEONFORTE on the LEONFORTE - NISSORIA

road. During the early part of the evening the Royal Canadian Regiment attacked the enemy position in front of NISSORIA and attained its objective. It was unable to hold it, however, in the face of intense enemy mortar and medium machine gun fire and was forced to retire. The battalion was thereupon ordered to attack NISSORIA. At 0100 hours, 25 July, the battalion moved along the NISSORIA road where it contacted the Royal Canadian Regiment and obtained the latest information from them. The advance continued and the battalion reached the high ground in square 4194. 'A' and 'B' Companies proceeded along the axis of advance which was gradually rising towards the town and on the way up 'B' Company, observing the enemy machine gun post, proceeded to put in a platoon attack against it which later developed into a company attack. The enemy, later estimated to have consisted of a battalion, opened fire and pinned 'B' Company to the ground. 'A' Company then moved into position on the left flank with 'C' Company on the right and 'D' Company following up in the rear but the

enemy fire was so intense that it was impossible to proceed without artillery support. The second-in-command, Major A.A. Kennedy, went back to brigade for artillery support. Meanwhile 'B' Company had overcome the enemy opposition in front of it and came under heavy mortar fire. They then dug in and were fired upon by enemy Mk III tanks from hull down positions. At this point the Commanding Officer (Lieutenant-Colonel the Lord Tweedsmuir) was seriously wounded in the leg by a splinter from a mortar bomb. The battalion was ordered to withdraw to the west of NISSORIA. At 1300 hours, 26 July, the battalion moved back to its former position at ASSORO.

On 27 July 2 CIB with Divisional artillery support captured NISSORIA on its way to AGIRA. During this engagement our casualties in killed and wounded were 9 officers and 200 other ranks.

On 28 July at 1330 hours the battalion moved across to an assembly area east of NISSORIA and re-organized. On 29 July the battalion rested and it was during this period that the General Officer Commanding, Major-General G.G. Simonds, CBE, DSO, addressed all officers and Warrant Officers of the battalion stressing the lessons learned in the recent fighting and also gave a complete tactical resume of the situation in general.

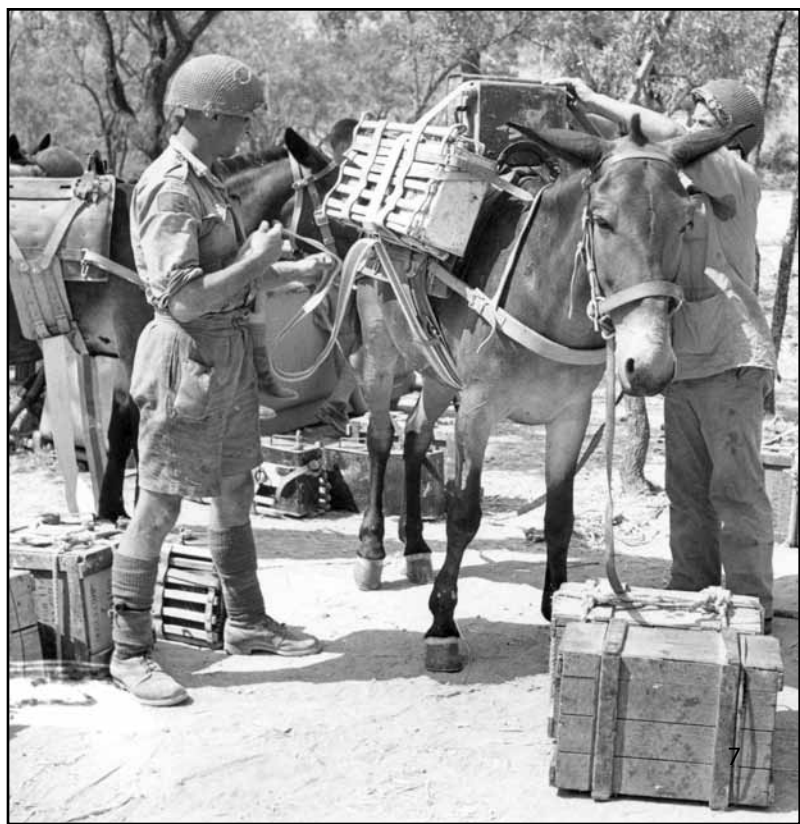
At 1000 hours, 30 July, the battalion moved to an assembly area in square 9544. At 1700 hours this advance continued through AGIRA to a position 6 miles west of REGALBUTO in square 9451, spending the night there and resting all the following day, 30 July. On 31 July at about 2000 hours the battalion moved off and marched towards REGALBUTO. The battalion's objectives were Mt. TIGLIO and Mt. GEORGIO. The battalion marched across country and at about 0500 hours, 1 August, reached Mt. TIGLIO where 'A' and 'B' Companies dug in and 'C' and 'D' Companies remained on the feature just below. At about 0900 hours the battalion received orders to withdraw from this feature into the valley at the foot of Mt. TIGLIO. On this occasion the mortars were manhandled over difficult country. At 1330 hours the battalion was ordered to attack two features east of REGALBUTO in squares 5995

and 6095. The battalion moved in the following order: 'D' Company, Battalion HQ, 'A' Company 'B' and 'C' Companies. The battalion came under fire on the bend of the road in square 5894. We extricated ourselves, however, and went to the high ground on Mt. GEORGIO. Here the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy, appreciated the situation, made his plans and using artillery support and 3" mortars made an attack with 'A' and 'C' Companies as fire companies and 'B' and 'D' Companies going in by a left flanking movement to the side of the hill. 'B' Company was to proceed to the side of the road to 5995 and 'C' Company was to continue through them to 6095 where they would consolidate. This movement was accomplished and 'A' and 'D' Companies took up positions in the battalion area. The enemy had in the meanwhile withdrawn.

The battalion remained in this area for two days, sending out patrols up to three miles forward, then on 4 August at 1730 hours the battalion moved by march route to CARCACI where it remained until 12 August and on 13 August the battalion moved to the present rest area under brigade orders.

The original of this document can be found at the National Archives of Canada, RG 24 Volume 10880.

Soldiers from the Edmonton Regiment
loading packs on mules, 3 August 1943.







Clockwise, from top left :

Canadian soldiers feed a group of Sicilian children, December 1943. (NAC E 000945238)

The Canadian War Cemetery at Agira, photographed shortly after the end of the campaign. (NAC E 000945237)

Italian prisoners of war help to unload wounded Canadian soldiers at the 5th Canadian General Hospital in Sicily, 11 August 1943. (NAC PA 193890)

Medal winners from a 1st Canadian Division track and field meet held in Sicily following the cessation of hostilities. (NAC E 000945234)

Soldiers from the Loyal Edmonton Regiment loading packs on mules, 2 August 1943. (NAC PA 166498)

A group of Sicilian children stand by the side of the road. (NAC E 000945235)

A German tank knocked out by Canadians on the main street of Leonforte, July 1943. (NAC PA 130347)

