

CASA BERARDI – 15 DECEMBER 1943

After breaking out of their Moro River bridgehead the 1st Canadian Infantry Division took the small hamlet of San Leonardo. Their next objective was a set of crossroads on the main Ortona – Orsogna lateral road. The 'Cider' crossroads as they were codenamed were only a mile and a half from San Leonardo, yet it would take the Canadians 10 days of tough fighting to reach them.

Part of the reason for this was a seemingly insignificant terrain feature, soon to be called 'The Gully' where *90. Panzergrenadierdivision* had dug in on reverse slopes, rendering the Canadians' supporting artillery somewhat ineffective.

General Vokes launched a series of piecemeal frontal attacks against the German lines, but the grenadiers were well supported by artillery, mortars and heavy machine-guns, and beat off each attack.

A new direction needed to be taken and on the night of 11/12 December 1943 the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade attempted to flank the worst section of The Gully and reach the 'Cider' crossroads. If they were able to do so, they would turn the German flank, control the main highway to Ortona and make the panzergrenadiers' position in 'The Gully' untenable.

Both the West Nova Scotia Regiment and the Carleton and York Regiment were unsuccessful in reaching the road and over the next 48 hours they were on the receiving end of numerous, near suicidal, counter-attacks by the Germans.

Both sides suffered heavy casualties and the West Novas and Carleton and York Regiments were so reduced in strength as to being unable to continue offensive operations.

On 14 December Le Royal 22^e Regiment (the Van Doos) took over the advance with 'C' Company on the left and 'D' Company on the right.

The Van Doos were the only all French-Canadian regiment in the Canadian army and felt that they had a certain reputation to uphold. They were to advance up a small track, which led around the right of 'The Gully' to reach the Ortona-Orsogna road. From there they would advance through the small farm of Casa Berardi and take the 'Cider' crossroads. The attack would be supported by 'C' Squadron, 11th Canadian Armoured Regiment, the Ontario Tanks and a corps level artillery barrage.

As the two companies reached the start line they immediately came under heavy mortar and machine gun fire. German Panzer IIIs and IVs began to engage the Van Doos who sought cover amongst the olive groves and grape vines. As the Shermans supporting them were still struggling up the muddy track, individual PIAT-wielding Canadian soldiers began to hunt the Panzers, until eventually a sergeant from 13 Platoon destroyed a Panzer IV Special (after the action 35 separate pieces of the tank were found scattered around on the ground).

Spurred on by this success, the Van Doos swept up to the roadway and then turned northeast towards Casa Berardi. Unknown to 'C' Company, they were now alone in the battle as 'D' Company had become disoriented in the action and

were heading in the wrong direction, engaging German forces where they found them.

They were now 2000 yards to the farmhouse. This area was 'a wasteland of trees with split limbs, burnt out houses, dead animals, and cracked shells of houses.' The Van Doos, now supported by Sherman tanks, advanced down the road in the face of withering fire. The company commander, Captain Paul Triquet, stirred his men on, telling them, 'There are enemy in front of us, behind us and on our flanks, there is only one safe place – that is on the objective.' The tanks engaged and destroyed two more Panzers and then 500 yards short of the manor house, the company was caught in a devastating firefight.

Still they fought on, finally reaching Casa Berardi and even trying to move beyond it to the crossroads, but 'C' Company's losses were too great and Captain Triquet and his men withdrew back to the farmhouse and dug in. Of his attacking company of 81 men, Triquet had just 14 soldiers left.

Of the attacking tank squadron only four tanks remained. They established a circular defensive perimeter, with the infantry on the outside and one tank pointing in each direction, and waited for the inevitable.

During the night the three remaining companies of Le Royal 22^e Regiment slipped through the lines of the surrounding Germans and joined 'C' Company where they made plans to continue the attack in the morning.

However, the Van Doos' second attempt to reach the crossroads ended in near disaster when 'B' Company was caught in its own supporting artillery fire, which allowed German tanks to manoeuvre into better positions to cover the Canadian advance.

Enemy artillery joined in, decimating the company. 'D' Company was caught in a heavy crossfire and the whole battalion retreated back to the farm complex, which continued to be targeted by artillery.

Unknown to the Canadians, during the night of 14/15 December the tired remnants of *90. Panzergrenadierdivision* were being replaced by elements of *1. Fallschirmjägerdivision*. In the Casa Berardi area, the paratroopers came from the III Battalion, *3. Fallschirmjäger-Regiment*.

At 1515 in the afternoon the *Fallschirmjäger* went on the offensive with assistance from the panzergrenadiers. Their first action in the defence of Ortona had begun.

PLAYING CASA BERARDI

This scenario is based on the old Cauldron Mission. The Canadians are defending and the German forces are attacking.

Casa Berardi is the large manor house in the centre of the table, with smaller outbuildings around it. This is the area to be defended by the Canadians. Other buildings on the table are generally in ruins because of the heavy artillery fire that has impacted the area lately. The well should be placed

CASA BERARDI SCENARIO

outside of the Canadians deployment zone, as they were unable to get water from it during the battle.

This artillery, along with the weather, has turned all the ground on the table into thick mud. Use the 'Soft Sand, Snow, or Mud' Terrain Rules found on Page 43 of the *Flames Of War* rulebook. Tanks from either side should therefore remain on the road and tracks or risk becoming bogged down, as they tended to historically.

Open terrain on the table is made up of scattered Olive Groves and Vineyards, as the players desire, and should provide a reasonable amount of cover to both attacker and defender. Terrain Rules for Olive Groves and Vineyards are also found on Page 43 of the *Flames Of War* rulebook.

Burnt-out and abandoned vehicles and tanks should also appear on the table as Wrecks.

Casa Berardi uses the **Ambush** (Canadian, page 103 of the rulebook), **Scattered Immediate Reserves** (German, page 104 of the rulebook) and **Immediate Reserves** (Canadian, page 104 of the rulebook) special rules.

YOUR ORDERS

CANADIAN

As you advance you face a vicious onslaught by the Germans and must repel them before continuing your advance.

GERMAN

The Canadians are moving on Ortona; you must stop them before they break through your line!

PREPARING FOR BATTLE

Set up terrain using the map as your guide.

Place the objectives at **A** and **B**.

The Canadian player must start the game with two Rifle Platoons on the table along with the Armoured Troop. These must be deploy at least 4"/10cm from the centre line of the table, at least 8"/20cm from their long table edge and at least 24"/60cm from the short table edges. One Unit is held in **Ambush**. The rest of the force is held in **Immediate Reserves** and arrives on the opposite table edge.



The German player nominates at least half of their Units to be held in **Scattered Immediate Reserves**. The player will roll to see which flank they will arrive from, being either short table edge.

Any remaining German Units are placed at least 16"/40cm from the centre line or within 8"/20cm of the side edge.

BEGINNING THE BATTLE

The Canadian player must place the Unit they held in **Ambush**.

The Canadian player has the first turn.

All Infantry and Gun Teams start the game in Foxholes, giving them Concealment and Bulletproof Cover. All Teams start the game Gone to Ground.

DECIDING WHO WON

The German player wins if they end their turn Holding an Objective.

The Canadian player wins if they end their turn on or after the sixth turn with no German Tank, Infantry or Gun within 8"/20cm of either Objective.

CAPTAIN PAUL TRIQUET, VC

Captain Paul Triquet was born on 2 April 1910 in Cabano, Quebec to a French family with a long military heritage. He was well-read on French military history and tried to enlist as a sixteen year old and then again, successfully, as a seventeen year old. (He told the recruiting officer he was nineteen).

Triquet entered Le Royal 22^e Regiment (the Van Doos) as a private and by the outbreak of World War Two was a Sergeant Major. When the Van Doos arrived in Britain he was recommended for an officer's commission.

At the Battle for Ortona Captain Triquet was in command of 'C' Company of the Van Doos. For his actions at Casa Berardi he was awarded the Victoria Cross, the first Canadian to receive one in the Italian Campaign. His citation read:

Throughout the whole of this engagement Capt. Triquet showed magnificent courage and cheerfulness. Wherever the action was hottest he was to be seen shouting encouragement to his men and organising the defence. His disregard for danger, his cheerfulness and devotion to duty were a constant source of inspiration to them. His tactical skill and leadership enabled them, although reduced by casualties to a mere handful, to continue their advance against bitter resistance and to hold their gains against determined counter-attacks. It was due to him that Casa Berardi was captured and the way opened for the attack on the vital road junction.



CAPTAIN PAUL TRIQUET, VC IN FLAMES OF WAR

PAUL TRIQUET

Wherever the action was hottest at Casa Berardi Canadian Captain Paul Triquet was to be seen shouting encouragement to his men and organising the defence. His disregard for danger, his cheerfulness and devotion to duty were a constant source of inspiration to them. His tactical skill and leadership enabled them, although reduced by casualties to a mere handful, to continue their advance against bitter resistance.

Any Unit from this Formation whose Unit Leader is within 6"/15cm and Line of Sight of the Formation Commander passes all Motivation rolls on 3+.

Any Unit from this Formation whose Unit Leader is within 6"/15cm and Line of Sight of the Formation Commander Unit passes Blitz rolls on 3+.

**British, Warrior, Formation
(Italy Rifle Company)**

**3
POINTS**

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Any Unit from this Formation whose Unit Leader is within 6"/15cm and Line of Sight of the Formation Commander passes all Motivation rolls on 3+.

Any Unit from this Formation whose Unit Leader is within 6"/15cm and Line of Sight of the Formation Commander Unit passes Blitz rolls on 3+.

AFTERMATH

The action started at 1515 hours and was essentially over 30 minutes later with the attack beaten off. A Royal Canadian Horse Artillery observer was on the heights above Casa Berardi and had a perfect view of the German advance. In one fifteen-minute period the RCHA landed 1,500 rounds on the attacking *Fallschirmjäger*.

Despite the ongoing barrage, with the farm seeming like an island, the attack continued. When it was over both sides had suffered heavy casualties and the Germans withdrew leaving many dead and a knocked-out Panzer IV behind.

From an initial strength of four companies the Van Doos reduced down to 79 men manning the defensive perimeter – less than one full company.

They would remain for the next 48 hours, reinforced by additional tanks and a rifle company made up of the Van Doos' cooks, typists and mechanics. The Canadians had won their first encounter with the *Fallschirmjäger*.

3RD CANADIAN INFANTRY BRIGADE, LE ROYAL 22^E REGIMENT

Canadian Units use the *Canadian Division Relentless* British Liberation of Italy command card with Italy Rifle Company

C Company HQ, Le Royal 22 ^e Regiment	Canadian Italy Rifle Company HQ 2x Sten SMG team & Paul Triquet command card.
13 Platoon (Assault), C Company	Canadian Rifle Platoon 7x Bren & SMLE rifle team, 1x PIAT anti-tank team, 1x 2-inch mortar.
14 Platoon, C Company	As above.
15 Platoon, C Company	As above.
16 Platoon, D Company	As above.
C Squadron, The Ontario Tanks, 11 th Canadian Armoured Regiment	Armoured Troop 3x Sherman (75mm) & Canadian Division Determination command card.
Field Battery, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery	Two 25 pdr Field Troops, each with 4x 25 pdr gun.

III BATALION, 3. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER-REGIMENT

German Fallschirmjäger Units as found in *Liberation of Italy*

Kompanie HQ, III Battalion, 3. Fallschirmjäger-Regiment, 1. Fallschirmjägerdivision	Italy Fallschirmjäger Company HQ 2x MP40 SMG teams.
Zug, III Battalion	Fallschirmjäger Platoon 10x MG42 & K98 rifle team, 1x Panzerschreck anti-tank team.
Zug, III Battalion	Fallschirmjäger Platoon 10x MG42 & K98 rifle team, 1x Panzerschreck anti-tank team.
Maschinengewehr Zug, III Battalion	Fallschirmjäger sMG42 Machine-gun Platoon 4x sMG42 HMG teams.
SUPPORT UNITS	
Attached Elements of 90. Panzergrenadierdivision:	Italy Panzergrenadier Company Unit from <i>Liberaton of Italy</i>
Panzer Zug, 190. Panzerabteilung	Panzer IV Tank Platoon 4x Panzer IV (7.5cm).
Panzergrenadier Zug	Panzergrenadier Platoon 7x MG42 team with Panzerfaust.

All forces used in this scenario can be found in *Liberation of Italy and its command cards*.

ALTERNATIVE FORCES

You may like to play this Scenario using different forces, perhaps fighting a similar battle in with different force, such as in on the Eastern Front or elsewhere in Italy.

The points value for the Attacking (Canadian) Force is 90 points, with at least 36 points of that in Immediate Reserves.

The points value for the Defending (German) Force is 72 points, with at least 29 points of that in Scattered Immediate Reserves.

