

# ITALIAN CAMPAIGN

## Seaforth Highlanders

Rome - Catania - Cassino - Liri Valley - Ortona - Rimini - Venice

May 15-28, 2023 (14 days)



*Seaforth Highlanders*



*Colosseum, Rome*



*Churchill tank*

### Highlights:

- Follow in the footsteps of our Canadian soldiers, who fought in the 1943-45 Italian Campaign, a key chapter in the liberation of Europe.
- Honour the contributions of the D-Day Dodgers in Sicily and mainland Italy in the fight against tyranny with Military Historian Karen Storwick; explore the key battle areas of Pachino, Leonforte and Agira in Sicily, and Monte Cassino, the Moro River, the Liri Valley, Ortona, Coriano Ridge and more on the mainland.
- Visit the memorials and war cemeteries of Agira, Cassino – the largest British and Commonwealth cemetery in Italy – Pontecorvo, the Moro River, Gradara, Montecchio and Coriano Ridge.
- Explore the beautiful cities of Rome, Rimini and Venice.



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## A WORD FROM SPECIAL TRAVEL



Dear Traveller(s),

After a couple of years in which overseas travel was put on hold, we are now entering an era in which we can pick up where we left off.

Important commemoration tours and group projects are about to take flight again. The Seaforth Regiment is about to embark on a special "pilgrimage" to Italy.

Over the years, members of the regiment have joined us on various tours to battlefields in Europe, from North-West Europe to Italy. For 2023, the regiment has entrusted us with their special program to Italy.

Since the "base camp" of the regiment is also in the city which is our home base, it is all the more important for us to make this tour a great one.

The Italian Campaign has been one of our mainstay tours since the mid-90s, when Ken MacLeod, our then military historian, started some wonderful relationships with local communities and historians in Italy, enabling us to run several special programs there over the years.

Karen Storwick, from Calgary, who has taken over from late Ken, has her own special family connection to the regiment. Her devotion to the Italian Campaign became instrumental in numerous plaque dedications and anniversary tours. Karen is the perfect historian for this particular commemoration tour to Italy.

We look forward to welcoming you along on this special tour which will cover important sites from Sicily north via Cassino and Ortona, to the Rimini area. While following the footsteps of the Canadian armies in general, the special focus will be on the places of importance for the history of the Seaforth regiment.

**Gery Valtiner**, Program Director

## KAREN STORWICK, Military Historian



Inspired by the death of her great-uncle, who served with the Seaforth Highlanders in Italy during the Second World War, Karen Storwick has become passionate about the preservation of Canadian military history, honouring Canadian veterans and raising awareness of their dedication and sacrifice.

Karen is the Founder and Director of the Mural of Honour

at the Military Museums in Calgary and through the mural teaches students and community groups about Canadian history and the importance of Remembrance.

Karen belongs to a group of Canadian and European historians working toward the common goal of commemorating unmarked battlefields in Europe with plaques and monuments. Since 2006, through her involvement with battlefield tours and pilgrimages with Special Travel International, she has travelled with over 70 veterans and their families, coordinated six plaques and monuments honouring Canadians in Italy and partnered in the unveiling of five others with her Italian colleagues.

In a continuing effort to preserve the experiences and memories of veterans, Karen has an ongoing Oral History project, having completed over 700 oral histories of Second World War, Korean War and Afghanistan War veterans. Together with Robert Curtin, she is currently producing *Fallen Heroes – Their Journey Home*, a film about the war in Afghanistan to be released in 2023.



*Karen Storwick's Meritorious Service Decoration, Feb 28, 2018*

In 2012 Karen was awarded the Veterans Affairs Commendation Medal for her work in the development of the Mural of Honour and the preservation of Canadian history in Italy. In 2017 Karen was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for her work to honour veterans of Canada.

When not occupied with military history, Karen immerses herself in her other passions; her family, her dogs, golf and music.



*Karen Storwick and a veterans group on the Italian Campaign tour, 2007*



*Karen Storwick at the Cassino War Cemetery*

# THE SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS and the Italian Campaign

The 72nd Battalion CEF (Seaforth Highlanders of Canada) had returned home from the Great War with well-deserved laurels and the Canadian Militia returned to its pre-war, part-time status. The Seaforths settled into what became the inter-war era, and prospered with many important regimental activities undertaken, not the least of which was the visit of HM King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1939. Little did anyone know that the world and Canada would be plunged back into a world war later that year.

Selected as one of the first battalions to mobilize and recruit, the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada became part of Canada's first overseas commitment, the 1st Canadian Division. Brigaded with the PPCLI and the Loyal Edmonton Regiment in the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, the Seaforths would spend the next five years in various parts of the world, far from their home in Vancouver.

Arriving in Scotland, the Division moved south and was heavily involved in the defence of Great Britain, as from May 1940 the fall of France and the evacuation from Dunkirk left Britain alone against Hitler, while suffering from a critical lack of supplies and military hardware. Gradually this subsided and by 1942 the Seaforths along with the rest of the Division, and the following formations, were busy training for what was expected to be an eventual strike at occupied Europe. Watching from the wings, as the Second Division was crippled at Dieppe in 1942, the Seaforths would see their first action as part of the 8th Army's invasion of Sicily, Operation Husky, in July 1943.

Landing on the beaches of southern Sicily near Pachino, the Seaforths were active in clearing the inland route across the Island. Fighting in extreme summer heat and rugged Sicilian mountains, the battalion participated in major attacks to take **Leonforte**, **Agira** and **Adrano**. The Seaforths were hardened in this campaign, and their casualties would need replacing. Kit needed to be replaced too. A period of rest and refit was had outside Militello in a place that became known as "Happy Valley". The Pipes and Drums under PM Ed Esson beat retreat in the stadium at Catania, with the sister battalions of the Imperial Seaforths also in the 8th Army. The invasion of the Italian mainland was to come.

Crossing the straits of Messina, the Division then began the advance up the boot of Italy. The German Army was actively undertaking a delaying action to buy time for the consolidation of a major defensive line known as the Gustav Line. It would be on the eastern flank of this line that the Seaforths would fight one of their most famous battles, **Ortona**.

The 1st Canadian Division launched a series of attacks over the ground south of the city and the Seaforths were active in crossing the **Moro River** and the taking of **San Leonardo**. As the advance continued, stiff resistance was had at **The Gully** and through a tough climb up steep cliffs, the Seaforths would gain lodgement in the city by taking a small church and the surrounding area. The Church of Santa Maria di Constantinopoli would later become the headquarters for the Seaforths, and serve as the location for one of the Regiment's most lauded events – the first Ortona Dinner. Heavy fighting in the cramped streets and tall houses of **Ortona** gave rise to it being called "Little Stalingrad". Eventually, over Christmas 1943, the city was cleared, and the Seaforths played a major part. With the Gustav Line breached, the next task was to assault yet another major line of fortifications, the Hitler Line.

The Seaforths attacked outside **Pontecorvo** on May 23, 1944 and suffered their worst casualties of the war. Assisted by the Churchill Tanks of the **North Irish Horse**, they fought their way through concrete emplacements, dug in tank turrets and machine guns. The cost was high but in the end the Division, fighting alongside its sister formation, the 5th Canadian Armoured Division commanded by Seaforth's own Bert Hoffmeister, was successful in breaking through. This attack was to be eclipsed by events in France the next month where the Invasion of Normandy would instantly turn all the Canadians and indeed all the Allies fighting in Italy, into the "D-Day Dodgers".

The battalion returned to the Adriatic coast and participated in the assault on the Gothic Line near **Rimini**, fighting in many actions. North of the Gothic Line the ground was crossed by many rivers and one particular would become famous for a small, yet hugely significant action.

While holding positions across the Savio River, elements of the battalion were counterattacked by German tanks and infantry. It fell to a small group of so called "tank hunters" armed with the PIAT (Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank) to hold the far bank. One of the most colourful men in the battalion, Pte Smith would attack this German force single handedly, in an effort to save his comrade. He knocked out a German tank and drove

off the accompanying infantry thereby saving his friend and enabling the battalion to hold the far bank. "Smokey" Smith would be awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions in this engagement.

Operations continued on into the Po River Valley and the winter of 1944-45 was a cold affair. This would see the Seaforths' last actions in Italy as in the new year, the Canadian Army would be consolidated in North-West Europe for the drive to liberate the Netherlands, thus ending the Seaforths' epic and storied campaign to take what Churchill called "The Soft Underbelly of Europe". Those that were there, might have said otherwise.



Jock MacStay,  
Seaforth Highlander



Rudy Deutsch,  
Seaforth Highlander



The Seaforth Highlanders

# ITINERARY

## Day 1 / Mon, May 15: DEPART CANADA

Depart for Italy.

## Day 2 / Tue, May 16: ARRIVE ROME

After arrival in **Rome**, transfer to your hotel. Free time to relax before dinner. (D)

## Day 3 / Wed, May 17: ROME – CATANIA

This morning embark on a panoramic tour of the **Eternal City** and see the Colosseum, Roman Forum and Piazza Navona, before visiting St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. After a drink with friends, transfer to the airport for your flight to the port city of **Catania, Sicily**. (B,D)

## Day 4 / Thu, May 18: CATANIA/ACIREALE

This morning, discover the exceptional D-Day Landing Museum in **Catania**, and enjoy a short visit to the town. Continue to the Canadian landing beaches of July 10, 1943 at **Costa dell'Ambra** near **Pachino** in south-eastern Sicily. Return to the hotel in time for dinner. (B,D)

## Day 5 / Fri, May 19: CATANIA/ACIREALE

Today, follow the inland route of the Canadians to the hill towns of **Leonforte** and **Agira\***, in Sicily's dramatic hinterland. Visit the Agira Canadian War Cemetery as well as the town. A visit to the area of **Grammichele** and the place the Seaforth Highlanders called the "Happy Valley" is also possible. (B,D)

*\*In the attack of the Seaforth of Canada of Agira (Sicily), July 28, 1943, Major Bell-Irving, Officer Commanding "A" Company was ordered to gain and hold the sharp ridge on the right which was held by the enemy in strength. This operation entailed a most difficult ascent of a precipitous feature under direct fire from enemy machine guns. During the approach to the feature "A" Company came under heavy fire from two hidden enemy tanks. Major Bell-Irving, despite the heavy enemy fire and the resultant casualties, attacked and routed the tanks. He continued the advance, positioning himself in the forefront at all times and under his hold leadership "A" Company stormed the hill, gained a foothold, and held the feature in spite of*

*repeated counter attacks and heavy enemy machine gun fire. This courage and determination with which this officer pressed forward completely disregarding his own safety was an inspiration and contributed to the success of the battalion attack.*

## Day 6 / Sat, May 20: CATANIA – ROME – CASSINO

After a morning flight from Catania to Rome, transfer to **Cassino**. Drive up to the historic **Abbey of Monte Cassino** overlooking the **Liri Valley**, which was captured by the Allies in a Polish-led initiative on May 17-18, 1944. (B,D)

## Day 7 / Sun, May 21: CASSINO

Full day at the Hitler Line for a battlefield analysis with a stop at the Canadian memorial in **Pontecorvo**. Finish the afternoon at the **Cassino Commonwealth War Cemetery**, the largest Commonwealth cemetery in Italy. (B,L,D)

## Day 8 / Mon, May 22: CASSINO – ORTONA

Depart for **Ortona**, on the Adriatic, stopping for lunch at a village outside of Ortona in the former Canadian HQ. Afternoon battle analysis of the Moro River, the Gully and Casa Berardi. Arrive at the hotel in time to enjoy a stroll along the beach or relax at the hotel before dinner. (B,L,D)

## Day 9 / Tue, May 23: ORTONA

Today's program includes an official event with the Mayor, a church service and a visit to **Ortona's Peace Museum**. Your local guide will conduct a walking tour of the street-fighting areas, as well as the beautiful Church of San Tomaso, which houses the bones of St. Thomas the Apostle. See the Church of Santa Maria di Constantinopoli where the Seaforths famously held a Christmas dinner in 1943. In the evening, enjoy a dinner function with local dignitaries. (B,D)

## Day 10 / Wed, May 24: ORTONA – RIMINI

This morning, visit the **Moro River Cemetery** before driving northward along the Adriatic Coast with a stop at **Gradara Cemetery**. Late afternoon arrival in **Rimini**. (B,D)



#### Day 11 / Thu, May 25: RIMINI

Today explore the battlefields of the Gothic Line, broken by the Canadians in August/September, 1944. Visit **Montecchio Cemetery** and **Pozzo Alto** before travelling to **Coriano Ridge Commonwealth Cemetery** and **San Fortunato Ridge**. Evening at leisure to visit the beautiful beaches of Rimini or enjoy some shopping in the historic centre. (B)

#### Day 12 / Fri, May 26: RIMINI

This morning explore the area in **Cesena** where Smokey Smith won his Victoria Cross and conduct a battlefield analysis at the **Savio River**. After lunch in the town of **Bagnacavallo**, explore the battles of the rivers. Evening at leisure to enjoy dinner on own. (B,L)

#### Day 13 / Sat, May 27: RIMINI – VENICE

Take a water taxi into the heart of **Venice**, La Serenissima. Enjoy a tour of the fascinating historic centre around Piazza San Marco and the stunning basilica; for its opulent design, gold ground mosaics, and its status as a symbol of Venetian wealth and power, from the 11th century on the building has been known as the Chiesa d'Oro (Church of Gold). After checking into your hotel, celebrate the conclusion of the tour with a farewell dinner. (B,D)

#### Day 14 / Sun, May 28: DEPART VENICE – ARRIVE CANADA

Transfer to the airport for your flight(s) home.

Those wishing to extend their stay in Italy can take a train to Florence or Rome. (B)

Minor adjustments may need to be made to our programme due to the scheduling of local events and security arrangements for ceremonies.

## TOUR COSTS in CAD\*

\*based on a group size of 32-40 travellers and currency exchange rate applicable at the time of printing (Oct 2022)

**Per person, twin-share** **\$5,890**

**Single supplement** **\$950**

**Land only** **\$4,290**

*(if booking your own transatlantic flights)*

## INCLUDED

- Return economy flights Vancouver – Rome; Venice – Vancouver incl. taxes *(for departures from other cities, please contact our office for a quote)*
- Return economy flights Rome – Catania – Rome incl. taxes
- Accommodation in superior tourist class hotels
- Meals as per itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Private air-conditioned coach transportation
- Comprehensive sightseeing incl. Military Historian, local guides and admission fees as per itinerary
- Special events and commemorations
- Gratuities for drivers and guides
- Local taxes and service charges

## NOT INCLUDED

- Travel insurance (please contact our office for a quote)
- Drinks with meals
- Hotel portage
- Seat selections on flights
- Items of a personal nature



Bridge of Tiberius, Rimini



Seaforth Highlanders

## THE D-DAY DODGERS (author unknown)

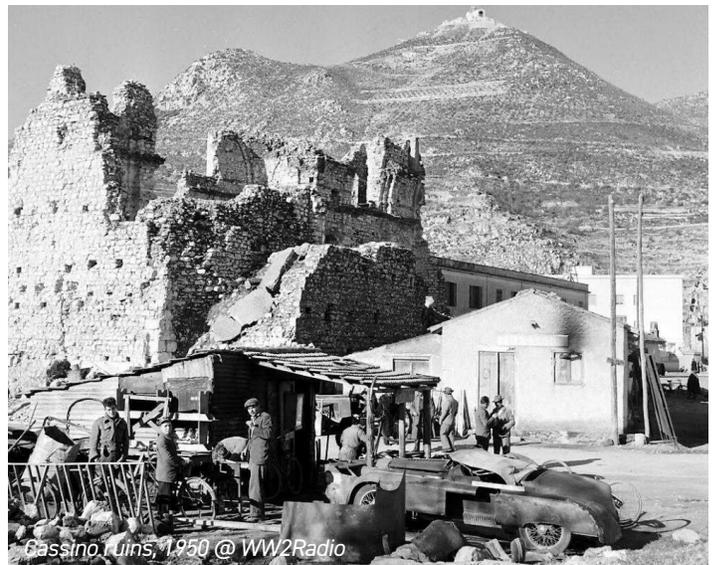
We are the D-Day Dodgers way out in Italy  
Always on the vino, always on the spree  
Eighth Army scroungers and their tanks  
We live in Rome among the Yanks  
We are the D-Day Dodgers in sunny Italy

We landed at Salerno, a holiday with pay  
The Jerries brought the bands out to greet us on the way  
Showed us the sights and gave us tea  
We all had girls and the beer was free  
We are the D-Day Dodgers in sunny Italy

Naples and Cassino were taken in our stride  
We didn't go to fight there, we just went for the ride  
Anzio and Sangro they're just names  
We only went to look for dames  
We are the D-Day Dodgers in sunny Italy

Dear Lady Astor, you think you know a lot  
Standing on a platform and talking tommyrot  
You're England's sweetheart and her pride  
We think your mouth's too bloody wide  
That's from your D-Day Dodgers in sunny Italy

Look around the mountains in the mud and rain  
You'll see the scattered crosses, there's some that have no name  
Heartbreak and toil and suffering gone  
The boys beneath them slumber on  
They are the D-Day Dodgers who'll stay in Italy  
They are the D-Day Dodgers who'll stay in Italy



Ortona Veterans



# RESERVATION FORM

ITALIAN CAMPAIGN – Seaforth Highlanders

May 15–28, 2023

Please complete this form and return it to us with your deposit of \$500.00 per person. Please write name(s) exactly as listed in passport (e.g.: William, not 'Bill'). Travel insurance is optional but strongly recommended.

	TRAVELLER #1	TRAVELLER #2 <small>(if different address/payment method than Traveller #1, please fill out a separate booking form)</small>
Title (Mr / Mrs / Ms etc.)		
First name		
Middle name(s)		
Last name		
Date of birth (dd/mmm/yyyy)		
City + country of birth		
Passport #		
Passport expiry (dd/mmm/yyyy)		
Passport issuing country		
Preferred first name (for name tag)		
Dietary restrictions		

## ADDRESS

Street:	
City:	Province/State:
Postal code:	Country:
Cell #:	Home #:
Email:	

## TRAVEL PREFERENCES

Accommodation:  Single\*  Double  Twin  Sharing with:

\*Please contact us if you would like to be paired up with another traveller and we will do our best to assist. If we are unable to arrange a twin-share, you will be accommodated in a single room and invoiced accordingly.

## EMERGENCY CONTACT

Next of kin's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Next of kin's phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

I/we would like to receive a travel insurance quote.  I/we have arranged my/our own travel insurance.

## PAYMENT

<input type="checkbox"/> Please make cheques payable to:	<b>SPECIAL TRAVEL INTERNATIONAL</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Send an e-transfer to:	<b>sti@sticanada.com</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Visa / MasterCard / American Express	(2% fee on credit card use; credit card number may be advised by phone)
Card #:	Expiry date:
Name on card:	Amount to be charged: \$

I/we acknowledge that I/we have read and agree to the terms and conditions outlined in the brochure.

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

# FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

## RESERVATIONS AND PAYMENT:

\$500 pp deposit due at time of booking  
2nd installment of \$1,000 pp due by January 10, 2023  
Balance due by March 15, 2023  
Tour documents will be sent to you approximately 14 days prior to your trip departure, provided full payment has been received.

## TOUR PRICES:

All tour prices for land arrangements are based on rates effective at the time of printing and are expected to be in effect at the time of departure. Should these rates change, it may be necessary to surcharge the price of your vacation. Should the tour price increase by more than 10%, the passenger shall have the right to cancel within seven days of notification without penalty.

## CANCELLATION AND REFUNDS:

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Until Jan 9, 2023	\$500
Jan 10 – Mar 14, 2023	\$1,500
Mar 15 – Apr 14, 2023	50%
From Apr 15, 2023	100%

*NB: different payment/cancellation policies apply to airline tickets; you will be advised at time of booking.*

## TRAVEL INSURANCE:

STI strongly recommends that each tour participant has health, cancellation, interruption, accident and baggage insurance for the duration of his/her travels.

## RESPONSIBILITY AND LIABILITY:

STI acts only as an agent in securing all services related to the tours described in this brochure, including transportation, sightseeing and accommodation. STI shall not be responsible or liable for any loss, cost, damage, injury, delay or expense arising from the use of any conveyance, accommodation or service or from acts of God, strikes, weather, quarantine, accidents, sickness, government regulations, insufficient documents and any loss expense resulting from the above contingencies shall be borne by the tour member. In the event it becomes necessary or advisable for the comfort of the passenger, or for any reason whatsoever, to alter the itinerary or arrangements, such alterations may be made without penalty to the operators. Additional expense, if any, shall be borne by the passenger. The right is reserved to withdraw any or all tours should conditions warrant, and also to decline to accept or retain any passenger as a member of the tour. In such instances, full or equitable amounts will be refunded.

## TRAVEL DOCUMENTS, VISAS AND VACCINES:

It is entirely the passenger's responsibility to possess whatever documents, visas and vaccines are required by the law of the countries visited on the tour.

## AIRLINE RESPONSIBILITY:

Any air carrier providing transportation in connection with these tours is not to be held responsible for any act, omission or event during the time the passenger is not on board its planes. The passenger contract in use by the airlines concerned, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airline and the purchase of these tours and/or passenger. Similar responsibility as noted applies to all types of carriers, including car rental companies.



Venice - Courtesy of Veneto Inside



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