

Through Blood and Sweat: A Remembrance Trek Across Sicily's World War II Battlegrounds

Mark Zuehlke

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As part of Operation Husky 2013, a group of Canadians walked this route to honour the memory of the nation's soldiers who fought in Sicily seventy years earlier and whose sacrifice has been largely forgotten. Under a searing sun, with Mount Etna's soaring heights always in the distance, a small contingent of marchers trekked each day along winding country roads for between 15 and 35 kilometres to reach the outskirts of a small town or village. Here they were joined by a pipe band, which led them to the skirl of bagpipes in a parade into the community's heart to be met by hundreds of cheering and applauding Sicilians. Before each community's war memorial a service of remembrance for both the Canadian and Sicilian war dead followed. Each day also brought the marchers closer to their final destination—Agira Canadian War Cemetery where 490 of the 562 Canadian soldiers who fell during the course of Operation Husky in 1943 are buried. On July 30—after twenty gruelling days—the marchers were joined here by almost a thousand Canadians and Italians. All joined to conduct a profoundly emotional ceremony of remembrance that ended with one person standing before each headstone and answering the roll call on that soldier's behalf. Mark Zuehlke, author of the award-winning Canadian Battle Series, was one of the Operation Husky 2013 marchers. He uses this arduous and poignant task as a focal point for a contemplative look at the culture of remembrance and the experience of war.



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