

Activity 3:

OPERATION HUSKY

The Inanimate Enemy

BACKGROUND

At the age of eighteen, well-known Canadian author Farley Mowat joined the ranks of Canadians volunteering for military service at the outbreak of the Second World War. Mowat enlisted in his father's regiment, the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment. He went to England in the summer of 1942 and the following year, took part in the Allied invasion of Sicily.

Mowat wrote a memoir, *And No Birds Sang* about his experiences in Sicily. In it he called the heat of the Mediterranean island the "inanimate enemy." The following are extracts from his book:

But first we had to win our battle with the inanimate enemy. (p. 95)

The sun had become an implacable enemy and our steel helmets became brain furnaces. (p. 73)

Evening brought surcease from the heat but none from dust and thirst. (p. 73)

This country is absolutely foul. Dry as a bone, hot as hell during the day and icy cold at night. The whole place looks like the North Dakota badlands. (p. 81)

Our worst enemy on that sun-baked slope was thirst. All our water bottles had long since been drained and we had become so thick-tongued and dry-mouthed that talking required a painful effort. (p. 102)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore the effects of the Mediterranean heat on Canada's troops during the Allied invasion of Sicily.

LINKS TO CANADIAN NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR GEOGRAPHY

- Essential Element # 1: The World in Spatial Terms
 - Map, globe, and atlas use
- Essential Element # 2: Places and Regions
 - Political and historical characteristics of regions
- Essential Element # 3: Physical Systems
 - World climate regions
- Essential Element # 6: The Uses of Geography
 - Effects of physical and human geographic factors on major historic events
- Geographic Skill # 4: Analyzing geographic information
 - Interpret and synthesize information obtained from a variety of sources

SUGGESTED GRADES

7-12

VOCABULARY

Climate
Operation Husky
Precipitation
Khaki Drill Uniform
Temperature

MATERIALS

- *Handout 1: Daily mean temperatures* (attached)
- *Handout 2: Khaki drill uniform* (attached)
- Maps of Sicily, average summer temperatures and mean annual rainfall (attached)

GETTING STARTED

Introduce the students to Operation Husky (operationhusky2013.ca). Have your students explore different maps of Sicily, including ones that show average summer temperatures and mean annual rainfall. Ask them to identify what challenges Canadian troops would have faced in a climate such as Sicily's? Have them consider that heat stress can happen when hot conditions and physical activity overcomes an individual's body's natural cooling system. A person might suffer cramps and fainting, or even serious heat exhaustion and heat stroke, heat stroke can kill quickly.

Read aloud several excerpts from Farley Mowat's *And No Birds Sang* and ask your students what they think he meant by the term, "inanimate enemy"?

DEVELOPMENT

Distribute a copy of *Handout 1: Daily mean temperatures* to each student. Check their understanding by asking how the average daily high in Enna in July and the average daily low in Palermo in August. Can they identify which months are the hottest and coolest? Using all of the resources thus far (Mowat's descriptions, the maps and the graphs), have students summarize the weather/climate faced by Canadian troops in Sicily during Operation Husky. Distribute a copy of *Handout 2: Khaki drill uniform* to each student. Using the photo as a guide, instruct students to make a list of benefits and drawbacks that these uniforms afforded Canadian soldiers in Sicily's climate.

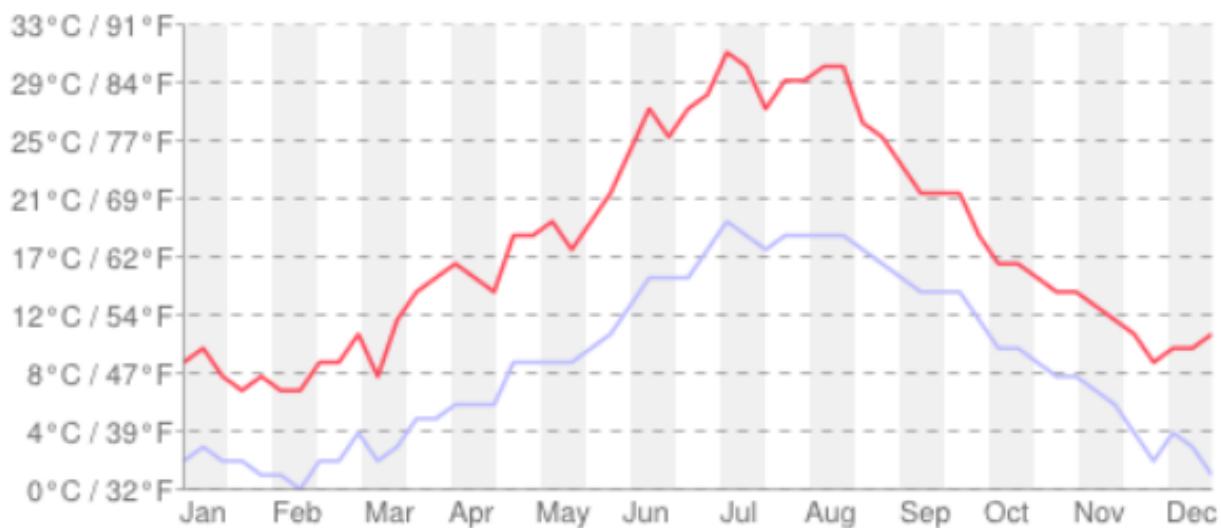
EXTEND YOUR GEOGRAPHIC THINKING

Interactions and associations – The Mediterranean Sea was the setting for Operation Husky. Canadian troops were transported by ship and faced several hardships on the journey, including sea sickness and death. Find out about the passage to Sicily and explore the relationship between it and natural phenomena, like the sirocco.

Handout 1: **DAILY MEAN TEMPERATURES**

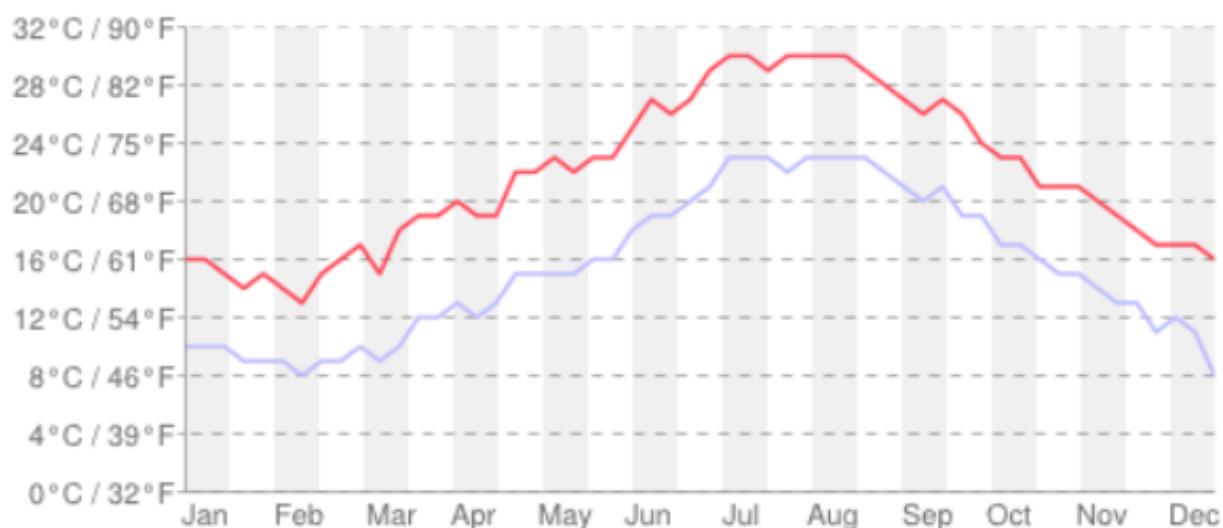
Enna: Daily mean temperatures

Red = Daily maximum; **Blue** = Daily minimum



Palermo: Daily mean temperatures

Red = Daily maximum; **Blue** = Daily minimum



Handout 2: **KHAKI DRILL UNIFORM**



Canadian troops on the way to Sicily. Both soldiers have been kitted out with Khaki drill clothing, and a Clasp Knife can be seen suspended from the equipment of the man on the left. He also carries a .45 calibre Thompson submachine gun, standard issue for Commonwealth soldiers in the Mediterranean.

Source: canadiansoldiers.com/history/operations/operationhusky.htm