# ROME-ARNO

The U.S. Army Campaigns
of World War II

# Introduction

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism. During the next several years, the U.S. Army will participate in the nation's 50th anniversary commemoration of World War II. The commemoration will include the publication of various materials to help educate Americans about that war. The works produced will provide great opportunities to learn about and renew pride in an Army that fought so magnificently in what has been called "the mighty endeavor."

World War II was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over several diverse theaters of operation for approximately six years. The following essay is one of a series of campaign studies highlighting those struggles that, with their accompanying suggestions for further reading, are designed to introduce you to one of the Army's significant military feats from that war.

This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Clayton D. Laurie. I hope this absorbing account of that period will enhance your appreciation of American achievements during World War II.

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# Rome-Arno

## 22 January–9 September 1944

Rome was quiet on the morning of 4 June 1944. Propaganda leaflets dropped during the early morning hours by order of the commander of the Allied 15th Army Group, General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, urged Romans "to stand shoulder-to-shoulder to protect the city from destruction and to defeat our common enemies." Even though the retreating Germans had declared Rome an open city, citizens were urged to do everything possible to protect public services, transportation facilities, and communications. "Citizens of Rome," the leaflets declared, "this is not the time for demonstrations. Obey these directions and go on with your regular work. Rome is yours! Your job is to save the city, ours is to destroy the enemy."

Hours later the first Fifth Army units, elements of the U.S. 3d, 85th, and 88th Infantry Divisions and the 1st Special Service Force, reached the outskirts of the city, encountering only scattered German resistance. The citizens of Rome remained indoors as instructed, but on the following day, 5 June, throngs of ecstatic Italians spilled into the streets to welcome the Americans as the main elements of the Fifth Army moved north through the city in pursuit of the *Tenth* and *Fourteenth Armies*. The stay of Fifth Army combat units in the city was brief, however, and within days the battle for Italy resumed to the north.

The liberation of Rome was the culmination of an offensive launched in late January 1944 that Allied leaders had hoped would both result in the capture of the Axis capital by 1 February and complete the destruction of the German forces in Italy. Instead, the Allies failed to break through the formidable enemy defenses until late May 1944. Even with Rome in Allied hands, the Italian campaign would last another eleven months until final victory.

### *Strategic Setting*

The Allied landings in Italy in September 1943, followed quickly by the liberation of Naples and the crossing of the Volturno River in October, had tied down German forces in southern Italy.

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By year's end a reinforced German army of 23 divisions, consisting of 215,000 troops engaged in the south and 265,000 in reserve in the north, was conducting a slow withdrawal under pressure from the U.S. Fifth Army under Lt. Gen. Mark Clark and the Commonwealth and Allied forces of the British Eighth Army under General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery. South of Rome the Germans constructed three major defensive lines: the Barbara Line, ill defined and improvised, stretching from Monte Massico to the village of Teano, to Presenzano, and to the Matese Mountains; the Bernhard, or Reinhard, Line, a wider belt of stronger fortifications forty miles north of Naples between Gaeta and Ortona, extending from the mouth of the Garigliano River near Mignano to Monte Camino, Monte la Difensa, Monte Maggiore, and Monte Sammucro; and the most formidable of the three belts, the Gustav Line, a system of sophisticated interlocking defenses, anchored on Monte Cassino, that stretched across the rugged, narrowest point of the peninsula along the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers.

In mid-January 1944 the Allied armies were through the first two belts and were facing the Gustav Line. Yet the Allied forces were exhausted from months of heavy fighting in bitter weather. The terrain also favored the defenders, who used the Apennine Mountains, with their deep valleys, foggy hollows, and rain-swollen streams and rivers, to slow the Allied advance to a crawl. Allied soldiers endured icy winds and torrential rains, lived in improvised shelters, ate cold rations, suffered from exposure and trench foot, and hauled their own munitions and supplies up and down steep mountainsides where vehicles and even mule trains were often unable to negotiate the few crude tracks or rocky crags.

The Fifth Army drive along the western half of the peninsula halted at the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers several miles from the base of Monte Cassino, a massif which blocked the entrance to the Liri valley, the most expeditious route to Rome. The Eighth Army drive along the eastern portion of the peninsula was also stalled well short of Pescara on the Adriatic coast. In describing the difficulties of the campaign, and the elusiveness of its goal, the Fifth Army's VI Corps commander, Maj. Gen. John P. Lucas, wrote that Rome seemed a long way off and that brilliant maneuvers were impossible in the mountainous terrain. The prospect of renewed frontal assaults over difficult ground, in poor weather, against a well-entrenched and determined enemy adversely affected the morale of all ranks. Maj. Gen. Frederick L. Walker, commanding



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the U.S. 36th Infantry Division of Fifth Army's II Corps, wrote in late December that there was little hope that the Italian campaign would end anytime soon. Taking one mountain mass after another gained no tactical advantage as there was always another mountain mass beyond with Germans on it.

The composition and capabilities of the Allied armies in Italy, and the nature of their operations, reflected the disagreement be-



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tween the American and British high commands about the overall Allied strategy in the Mediterranean. The British had long favored a peripheral, or indirect, approach to defeating Germany. They sought to engage the Axis in the Balkans and Mediterranean, drawing enemy forces from other fronts and whittling away their strength. Only after the Allies had amassed an overwhelming superiority in men and materiel were they willing to think favorably of a knockout blow across the English Channel. The Americans favored an immediate cross-Channel assault, but they saw their 1942 and 1943 invasion plans delayed by materiel and manpower shortages as well as by the reluctance of their allies to undertake the climactic blow. To the Americans, each diversion of men and equipment to the Mediterranean theater, especially amphibious shipping, which was in short supply throughout the world, only delayed the main event. When the Allies decided to schedule the invasions of Normandy (OVERLORD) and southern France (ANVIL) for the summer of 1944, Italy was destined to become a holding action of secondary importance.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower relinquished command of the Mediterranean theater early in January 1944 to assume command of the Overlord invasion forces. His successor, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, turned over the main responsibility for directing Mediterranean operations from the American Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to the British Chief of Staff, General Sir Alan Brooke, and to Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill, who immediately attempted to revitalize the Italian campaign. Churchill wanted the theater to receive increased support, commenting in mid-December that the stagnation of the whole Italian front was becoming scandalous. He added that the capture of Rome was essential since the success or ruin of the Italian campaign depended on it.

To restore maneuver to the battlefield, Allied leaders in November had discussed an amphibious landing behind enemy lines at Anzio, thirty-five miles southwest of Rome. The lack of troops and landing craft, however, caused the cancellation of the plan in December. With the change in theater leadership and the concomitant British insistence on an increased effort in Italy, the Anzio idea was revived. The new plan called for the Fifth Army to land two divisions at Anzio and rapidly drive inland toward Rome to cut enemy supply and communication lines. To facilitate the invasion, the main body of the combined Fifth Army, consisting of the British 10 Corps, the French Expeditionary Corps (FEC), and



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the U.S. II Corps, would draw German forces away from Anzio by attacking toward the Rapido and Garigliano Rivers. Clark's forces would then cross the rivers, take the high ground on both sides of the Liri valley, and advance north to link up with the Anzio beachhead. Eighth Army, under Lt. Gen. Sir Oliver Leese, would support these operations by crossing the Sangro River and capturing Pescara, further tying down the enemy. The offensive in the Fifth Army area would start on 17 January, and 40,000 Allied troops would land at Anzio five days later.

## *Operations*

The British 10 Corps attacked with two divisions across the Garigliano River near Minturno on 17 January. The 5th and 56th Divisions ferried ten battalions to the far bank and established a bridgehead. This posed a serious threat to the Gustav Line and stunned the *XIV Panzer Corps* commander, Maj. Gen. Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, whose forces opposed Fifth Army. Senger knew that the hard-pressed *94th Grenadier Division* could not stop the British without help. On 18 January he appealed to Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the commander of German forces in Italy, to send immediate reinforcements to the Garigliano front. Having been informed by military intelligence that no Allied landings were expected in Italy, Kesselring sent the *9th* and *29th Panzer Grenadier Divisions*, units he had held in reserve to counter a possible amphibious operation, south from Rome. These German units halted the British drive far short of the heights the Americans considered vital for their Rapido assault, and attempts by the British 46th Division to cross on 19 January failed against heavy resistance, leaving the U.S. II Corps flank unprotected as the Americans prepared to storm the Rapido the next day. The British did draw enemy reserves away from the Anzio area, thus obtaining one vital Allied goal, but at a cost of more than four thousand casualties.

The 36th Infantry Division of the II Corps had been ordered to cross the Rapido River in the vicinity of Sant'Angelo, a village atop a forty-foot bluff. The *15th Panzer Grenadier Division*, considered one of the best enemy units in Italy, opposed the Americans. The Rapido was a small but swift-flowing river, 25 to 50 feet wide and 10 to 15 feet deep, with banks varying in height from 3 to 6 feet. There were few covered approaches to the river. Because the British 10 Corps and the French Expeditionary Corps had



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*The Rapido River viewed from Monte Trocchio. (National Archives)*

failed to expel the Germans from the heights on both sides of the Liri valley between 12–20 January, the entire area was under enemy observation. The 141st and 143d Infantry regiments of the 36th Division were to cross the river on the night of 20 January and envelop Sant'Angelo from the north and south. Both the division commander, General Walker, and the II Corps commander, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey T. Keyes, feared heavy losses. The assaulting units were below strength and contained many unassimilated recruits and inexperienced small unit leaders who had only recently arrived to fill the gaps left by the heavy losses suffered in earlier battles. Additionally, the troops lacked sufficient boats, bridging equipment, and training in river crossings. The engineers assigned to assist the crossings had obtained over a hundred rubber and wooden assault boats, but were unable to move them to the river bank because of withering enemy fire, poor roads, land mines, and spongy ground. They left the craft several miles to the rear near Monte Trocchio for the already heavily laden infantrymen to carry to the river on the night of the attack.



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Despite alternative suggestions from his subordinates, General Clark insisted on crossing the Rapido at the planned point and time to keep pressure on the Germans during the Anzio landing and to gain a bridgehead so that armored units of Combat Command B (CCB), 1st Armored Division, could dash north up the Liri valley toward Anzio. Like Walker and Keyes, Clark expected heavy losses, but he considered the Rapido attack vital to draw enemy forces away from the Anzio area. In the days before the attack, Walker expressed his pessimism in his diary, confiding that the attack might succeed, but that he did not see how it could. Walker believed the mission was poorly timed and that a frontal attack across the Rapido would end in disaster. He wrote that he was prepared for defeat.

At 1905 on 20 January, after an artillery barrage of 31,000 shells, the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry, began its assault. As expected, the unit immediately came under heavy enemy mortar, artillery, and small arms fire. The unit suffered severe casualties, especially from artillery and land mines—one company lost thirty men to a single shell—and quickly became disorganized. Rumors ran rampant, markers indicating cleared paths through minefields were destroyed or lost, guides became disoriented in the fog and darkness, infantrymen refused to cooperate with the engineers, and men wandered away from their units. Enemy fire damaged or destroyed most of the assault boats on the river bank, and the remainder were hit soon after they entered the water. Much of the bridging equipment was destroyed before it reached the river, and efforts by the engineers to construct bridges failed amid a rain of enemy shells. By 0400 about a hundred men of the 1st Battalion had crossed the river, but the only remaining footbridge was soon destroyed, isolating them on the far bank. German artillery knocked out telephone wires, field radios were lost or malfunctioned, and engineer and infantry units were quickly pinned down on both sides of the river. At dawn on 21 January the regimental commander suspended the attack, ordered the troops on the near bank to fall back, and directed those on the other side to dig in until help arrived.

The 143d Infantry fared little better. It began its attack at 2000 on 20 January using two crossing points a mile to the south of the 141st. Two companies of the 1st Battalion crossed the rain-swollen river at the northerly site by 0500, 21 January. Enemy artillery fire destroyed most of their boats, and with casualties on the far bank



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increasing, the regimental commander ordered his soldiers to withdraw across the river, a movement completed by 1000. At the other site accurate enemy artillery fire and land mines inflicted such a toll in men and boats and caused such confusion that an assault was not even attempted. The units withdrew to their preattack positions at daybreak.

On orders from Clark and Keyes, Walker prepared a renewed assault by both regiments for the night of 21 January. Confusion, shaken morale, destruction of equipment, and the dispersal of forces, however, delayed the assaults. The 143d Infantry attempted a crossing between 1600–1830 on 21 January under heavy artificial smoke. Although three battalions succeeded in reaching the far bank by 0200 on 22 January, enemy artillery stymied efforts to place bridges across the river to allow reinforcement by armor and infantry units. Heavy fog caused by the weather and artificial smoke pots prevented counterbattery fire, mines accounted for still more casualties, and demoralization and disorganization gripped most units.

Amid the confusion and heavy enemy fire, many soldiers behaved bravely. S. Sgt. Thomas E. McCall, Company F, 143d Infantry, commanded a machine gun section providing fire support for riflemen crossing the river. Under cover of darkness, Company F advanced to the crossing site and despite intense enemy mortar, artillery, and machine gun fire traversed an ice-covered footbridge. Exposing himself to the deadly enemy fire that swept over the flat terrain, McCall, with unusual calmness, welded his men into an effective fighting unit. He led them forward across barbed-wire entanglements and personally placed the weapons of his two squads in positions covering his battalion's front. A shell landed near one of the positions, wounding the gunner and killing the assistant gunner. Amid the artillery barrage, McCall crawled forward and carried the wounded man to safety. After the crew of the second machine gun was wounded, Sergeant McCall was the only effective member of his section. He picked up a machine gun and ran forward firing the weapon from his hip, successfully assaulting a series of enemy positions single-handed. Severely wounded in his final attack, McCall was captured and spent the duration as a prisoner of war in Germany. His actions helped stabilize the battalion's position, and he was later awarded the Medal of Honor. Despite such individual acts of courage, by the early afternoon of 22 January the second



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crossing attempt had failed, and the badly mauled and disorganized battalions on the far bank were ordered to withdraw.

The efforts of the already battered 141st Infantry were even less successful. The 2d and 3d Battalions crossed the river beginning at 2100 on 21 January, but they found no survivors from among the hundred men stranded on the far bank the night before. Army engineers began constructing a heavy vehicle bridge almost immediately after the crossing began, but enemy artillery halted work at 0945 the next day, and construction never resumed. The remaining footbridges either were washed away or were destroyed by enemy artillery. The troops in the bridgehead, unable to move forward farther than 600 yards, endured a merciless pounding by enemy mortars and artillery. By 1800, 22 January, all officers except one were casualties. All boats and bridges were destroyed, communications were out, and the units were cut off. As other units farther downstream completed their withdrawals, the Germans attacked the stranded men of the 141st. Forty men managed to swim back across the river; the remainder were either killed, wounded, or captured. All sounds of firing from the far bank ceased at 2140.

In forty-eight hours the 141st and 143d Infantry regiments had suffered 2,128 casualties: 155 killed, 1,052 wounded, and 921 missing or captured. Enemy losses were negligible, and their scarce reserves were never committed. General Walker later wrote in his diary that the 36th Division had been sacrificed for no justifiable end and that he fully expected General Clark to fire him to cover Clark's own error in judgment. Clark, Walker wrote, admitted that the failure to cross the Rapido was as much his fault as anyone's. But the Fifth Army commander's admission of failure was not an admission of error. The attack was part of Alexander's overall offensive plan and not the result of Clark's own initiative, and it did succeed in tying down enemy forces during the Anzio landings as intended. Clark held that some blood had to be spilled on either the land or SHINGLE (Anzio) front, and that he preferred it be on the Rapido, where Allied forces were secure, rather than at Anzio where the Allies had the sea at their back. He maintained that the attack was necessary within the context of the overall offensive—a position supported by a postwar congressional inquiry and then Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson.

As the Rapido crossing attempts ended on 22 January, preventing the planned Fifth Army drive up the Liri valley, the VI Corps successfully implemented Operation Shingle and landed unop-



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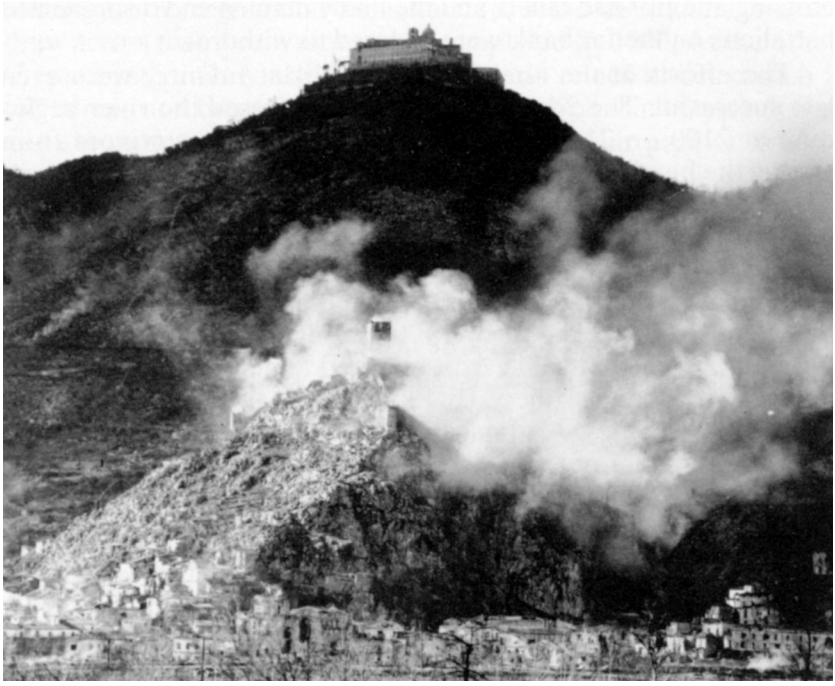

*Cassino: the monastery, the castle, and the town.* (National Archives)

posed at Anzio. During the following weeks the combined Anglo-American corps established a 15-by-22-mile beachhead, forcing the Germans to divert the *Fourteenth Army* under General Eberhard von Mackensen from northern Italy to the south. Other German units had to be dispatched to Italy, weakening enemy forces in Germany, France, and the Balkans. Yet the VI Corps commander, Maj. Gen. John P. Lucas, in a controversial interpretation of Alexander's and Clark's orders, directed the invasion forces to dig in before launching an offensive. His intention was to ensure the survival of the beachhead against a probable enemy counterattack, but the effect was to delay a breakout effort until 30 January. By that date the Germans had massed 70,000 troops around Anzio, and they effectively halted the Allied offensive with heavy losses on both sides. While subsequent enemy counterattacks failed to destroy the beachhead, which eventually contained 110,000 soldiers, the planned rapid advance on Rome had been stalled.



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Faced with the necessity of breaking through to the beleaguered Anzio beachhead, General Clark launched attacks over the high ground northeast of Cassino. The British 10 Corps resumed its attack from the Garigliano bridgehead. The U.S. 34th Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Charles W. Ryder, with the aid of the FEC and one regiment of the 36th Division, attempted to outflank Cassino and to storm the Benedictine monastery on Monte Cassino above the town, Highway 6, and the Liri valley. In a series of costly engagements the II Corps and the FEC bent, but failed to break, the Gustav Line in an area held by six enemy divisions under the overall control of *Tenth Army* commander Lt. Gen. Heinrich van Vietinghoff. American and French units gained a slight foothold on the northeastern slopes of Monte Cassino itself, while units of the 34th Division crossed the Rapido by 26 January.

The 34th Division renewed attacks on Cassino in early February to pave the way for yet another attempt at the Liri valley by the recently created New Zealand Corps under Lt. Gen. Sir Bernard Freyberg. This corps consisted of the 2d New Zealand and 4th Indian Divisions and the CCB of the U.S. 1st Armored Division. The 34th Division drive encountered stiff resistance all the way to Cassino, with advances characterized by small unit attacks on successive German defensive positions. Second Lt. Paul F. Riordan led his platoon into the town after personally destroying a pillbox that had pinned his unit down. Attacking the jail, a major strongpoint, Riordan again took the lead, managing to penetrate a ring of enemy fire covering the approaches to the building. Finding himself cut off and aware that his men were unable to assist him, the young officer continued the attack alone. He was finally killed by small arms fire after a bitter fight with the defenders. Lieutenant Riordan's bravery was an inspiration to his men, and he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. But despite such heroic efforts by soldiers in the 133d, 135th, and 168th Infantry regiments, the Germans still held the town after six days of fighting.

One last American attempt to take Cassino was launched on 10 February with heavy artillery support, but the troops of the II Corps and FEC were nearing exhaustion, and the drive failed. The newly formed New Zealand Corps took over the sector from the Americans, who, according to Alexander's American deputy chief of staff, Brig. Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, were so disheartened as to be almost mutinous. With the withdrawal of the British 56th Divi-



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sion from the Garigliano front to reinforce the hard-pressed force at Anzio, the drive toward Cassino stopped.

The Allies had realized early in their campaign against the Gustav Line that the historic monastery dominating the summit of Monte Cassino (1,703 feet above sea level) was a crucial strategic point. Nevertheless, they exempted the monastery, founded in 524 A.D. by St. Benedict, from air, artillery, and ground attacks during the American assaults on Cassino. Even though the Allies later learned that the monastery itself was never permanently occupied by the Germans, frequent sightings of enemy personnel within its walls raised suspicions. In addition, the enemy built heavily fortified emplacements and observation posts within feet of the monastery to take full advantage of the terrain and Allied firing prohibitions. But there was no consensus that the Allied exemption regarding Monte Cassino was wise. General Alexander and his superiors had long maintained that the safety of such areas would not be allowed to interfere with military necessity. When General Freyberg began to plan his assault, he concluded that the monastery would have to be reduced and requested air attacks.

General Clark, Freyberg's immediate superior, disagreed with this assessment, and he was supported in his view by French General Alphonse Juin and Generals Keyes, Walker, and Ryder. Clark hoped to avoid destroying a historic religious site, and in the process providing the enemy with valuable propaganda. Nonetheless, Clark also wanted to give the New Zealand Corps every possible advantage in jump-starting the Allied drive. In addition, sensitive to the combined Allied command structure in the Mediterranean, he was hesitant to deny Freyberg's request because of the serious political repercussions that would result if Commonwealth forces later sustained substantial losses. Clark therefore passed on Freyberg's request to attack the monastery to Alexander and his chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Sir John Harding. Both British officers decided that if Freyberg thought the monastery's destruction was a military necessity, the attack should proceed, with Alexander concluding that he had faith in General Freyberg's judgment. Their opinion was confirmed by General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, the Supreme Allied Commander of the Mediterranean theater. After making his own position clear, Clark complied with the wishes of his superiors and granted his subordinate's request. General Freyberg's decision, widely condemned at that time and since, is still mired in controversy.



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Freyberg's plan called for an air attack on the monastery followed by a ground attack by the 4th Indian Division. This infantry assault would clear Monte Cassino while the 2d New Zealand Division forced the Rapido to the south. Teamed with armored detachments, the two divisions would then converge for the drive up the Liri valley. Freyberg's request for an air attack, however, was greatly expanded by air force planners, and probably supported by Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, the American commander in chief of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces, and Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, Wilson's American deputy theater commander. The Americans sought to use the opportunity to showcase the abilities of the U.S. Army air power to support ground operations. Following the dropping of leaflets warning civilians in the monastery to evacuate, the Tactical and Strategic Army Air Forces, consisting of the 319th, 340th, 321st, 2d, 97th, 99th, and 301st Bomber Groups, began their bomb runs at 0945, 15 February 1944. A total of 142 B–17s, 47 B–25s, and 40 B–26s dropped 1,150 tons of high explosives and incendiary bombs on the abbey, reducing the entire top of Monte Cassino to a smoking mass of rubble. Between bomb runs the II Corps artillery pounded the mountain.

The controversial bombing destroyed much of the monastery and its outer walls but did not penetrate the subterranean chambers the Allies thought the Germans were using as bomb shelters. When the 4th Indian Division launched its attack on the night of 15 February, it was repulsed with heavy casualties. Over the next three days fighter-bombers provided close support of further Indian assaults, all of which failed with tremendous losses. Even though the 2d New Zealand Division, aided by 34th Division and 36th Division artillery, crossed the Rapido and made significant headway into Cassino, the heavy losses sustained by Allied units, especially the Indians, forced a halt in operations and a withdrawal from the slopes.

In mid-March the Allies attacked Monte Cassino again. The new assault was to coincide with an attack on the town of Cassino by the 2d New Zealand Division and CCB, 1st Armored Division. The latter units hoped to force a further crossing of the Rapido, capture Sant'Angelo, cut Highway 6, and assist the British 78th Infantry Division to penetrate the Liri valley. Although most commanders now doubted whether air assaults could reduce the Cassino defenses to the point where the infantry could succeed, a large air attack was nonetheless planned. Successive waves of bombers were to pulverize Cassino between 0830 and noon, deliv-



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ering 750 tons of 1,000-pound bombs with delayed-action fuses. During the afternoon, every artillery piece on the Cassino front would target the town and provide a creeping barrage for the attacking Indian infantry.

On 15 March 1944, Generals Clark, Alexander, Eaker, Freyberg, and Devers watched the air attack on Cassino from three miles away. On schedule, 514 medium and heavy bombers, supported by 300 fighter-bombers and 280 fighters, dropped high explosives on the area. During the afternoon, 746 artillery pieces of the British 10 Corps, the U.S. II Corps, and the New Zealand Corps fired 200,000 rounds, delivering another 1,200 tons of explosives. The bombardment failed to meet expectations. As the infantry and armored units advanced over the cratered and now nearly impassable terrain, they found the German positions still intact and enthusiastically defended. Despite new air attacks by fighter-bombers, and another 106 tons of bombs, the New Zealanders and Indians made little progress. Still further air attacks on 16-17 March, which dropped 466 tons of bombs, produced no tangible results. By 21 March, seven days into the attack, General Clark called on Freyberg to break off the assault, a decision thought prudent by Generals Juin and Leese as well. Yet thinking that success was just within reach, Freyberg continued the attack until Alexander compelled him to halt the offensive on 23 March. After multiple air assaults, the firing of 600,000 artillery shells, and 1,316 New Zealander and 3,000 Indian casualties, Cassino, Monte Cassino, and the Liri valley remained in German hands.

The Allies had failed to break the Gustav Line three times: in January with the ill-fated assaults on the Rapido River; in February with the attempt to outflank Cassino; and in March with the attempt to drive between the monastery on Monte Cassino and the town below. The Germans remained in firm control of the fortified line stretching from the Gulf of Gaeta on the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Adriatic, and they were now preparing the Hitler Line, five to ten miles farther north. These new defenses stretched from Terracina to the Liri valley and Monte Cairo and were manned by the equivalent of nine divisions of the *LI Mountain Corps* under Lt. Gen. Valentin Feuerstein. To meet further Allied attacks, the *Tenth* and *Fourteenth Armies* gathered 365,000 soldiers, the bulk of the 412,000 German troops stationed in Italy south of the Alps.

General Alexander used the period from March to May 1944 to rebuild his forces and plan the final push on Rome. To assure an



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overwhelming victory, and to avoid the battles of attrition encountered thus far, the 15th Army Group commander estimated that he needed at least a three-to-one advantage in infantry over his adversaries, requiring a major reorganization of the Allied line. The Fifth Army front was therefore reduced to twelve miles—just the narrow coastal plain along the Tyrrhenian Sea. With the addition of two new American infantry divisions to the II Corps, the 85th and 88th, the arrival of the IV Corps headquarters, and the addition of the 4th Moroccan Mountain and French 1st Motorized Divisions to the FEC, Fifth Army strength was over 350,276 by late April. The Eighth Army front had been extended westward across the Apennines to Cassino. Its multinational force of 265,000 men represented twenty-one nations and included the British 5, 10, and 13 Corps; the Canadian 1st Corps; the New Zealand Corps; and the 2d Polish Corps under Lt. Gen. Wladyslaw Anders.

As the Allies regrouped on the ground, the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF) began Operation STRANGLE on 11 March. The goal of this air campaign was to cut enemy supply lines south of the Alps and weaken the German armies logistically, thereby diminishing their ability to withstand a new offensive. When STRANGLE ended on 11 May, the air forces had conducted over 65,000 sorties and dropped 33,000 tons of bombs on road, rail, and sea routes. In spite of inclement weather and an inability to bomb at night, the air attacks disrupted transportation at all points south of a line running from Pisa to Rimini. The Germans repaired most of the damage, however, and continued to reinforce and resupply the front, although at a slower and reduced pace.

The Allied offensive planned for May 1944, code-named DIADEM, had the dual goals of tying down German forces in Italy during Overlord and capturing Rome. Alexander's controversial plan, which was not to Clark's liking because of the supporting role it assigned to the Fifth Army, called for the Polish Corps to take Monte Cassino while the British 13 Corps crossed the Rapido, took Cassino, and hit the northern flank of the Hitler Line. Fifth Army's VI Corps would break out of Anzio; move inland to capture Valmontone, a village straddling Highway 6; and cut the *Tenth Army's* line of retreat. The remainder of the Fifth Army was to protect the Eighth Army's left flank during the drive north for the link-up with VI Corps and subsequent advance on Rome. Implicit in Alexander's plan was the destruction of German military forces south of Rome.



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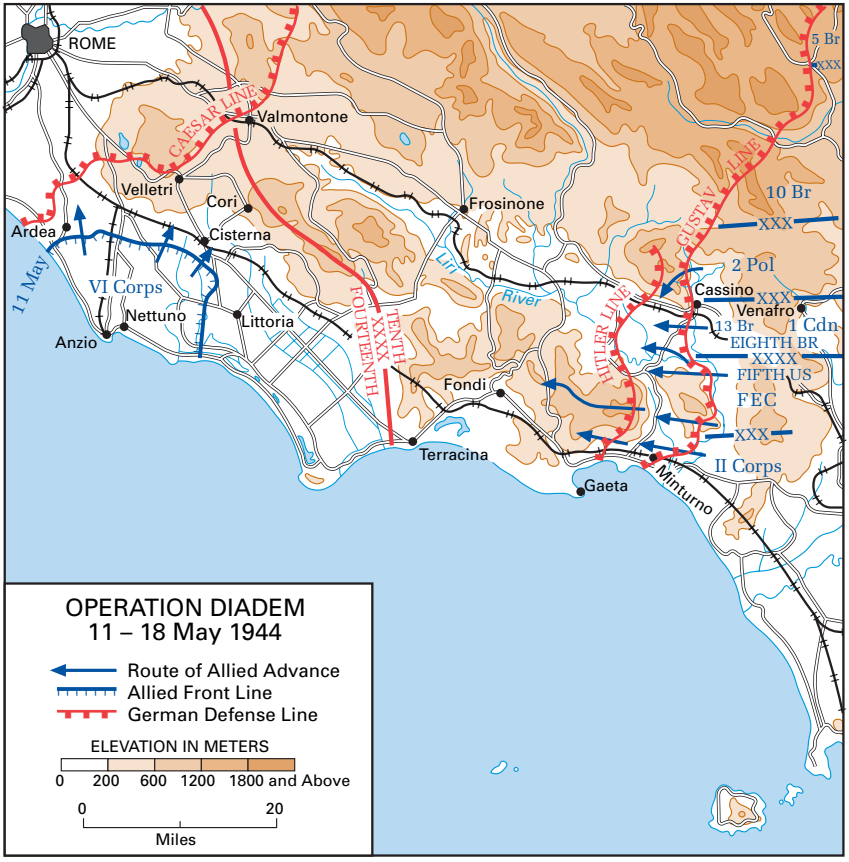


Although General Alexander clearly intended the Eighth Army to play the major role in DIADEM, General Clark wanted to ensure that the Americans, not the British, took Rome, and he actively sought to have the Fifth Army's role increased to bring about this aim. Although he was rebuffed in his efforts during a tense 1 May meeting with Alexander, the latter was aware that Clark's views differed from his own. To maintain cordial relations with his ally, Alexander provided only the most general orders to Clark, thus allowing him great flexibility in determining Fifth Army deployments during the coming weeks.

The long-awaited spring offensive commenced on 11 May 1944 at 2300 with a massive barrage by 1,660 artillery pieces along the entire front from Cassino to the sea. When the barrage lifted,



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twenty-five Allied divisions attacked. The British 13 Corps immediately crossed the Rapido at two points and established a small bridgehead, but the Polish Corps assault on Monte Cassino failed with more than 50 percent of the attacking force counted as casualties. In the II Corps area the U.S. 88th Infantry Division made slight progress against heavy resistance, while the 4th Moroccan Mountain Division succeeded in taking Monte Majo on 13 May after bitter fighting, breaking the Gustav Line. This FEC penetration over rugged terrain succeeded in securing the high ground overlooking the Liri valley and threatened not only the entire left wing of the *XIV Panzer Corps*, but also the Germans at Cassino. Sensing an opportunity to widen the breach in the Gustav Line in the Monte Majo area, both the 85th and 88th Divisions smashed into the German positions and after savage fighting forced the defenders back. Having lost over 40 percent of their combat strength in just three days, with pressure building along the entire Gustav Line, and faced with the encirclement of Cassino, the Germans began to withdraw to the north, fighting desperate rearguard actions the entire way. By the early morning hours of 16 May, the II Corps and FEC had broken the Gustav Line at several points at the cost of 3,000 casualties, 1,100 in the 85th Division alone. To the east, the British 13 Corps also broke through the German defenses, with the Canadians pouring across the Rapido and the British 78th Division cutting Highway 6. On 17 May the Polish Corps, supported by the 78th Division, again attacked Monte Cassino and, following a day of ferocious combat and heavy losses, rendered the German positions untenable. During the night the remaining enemy forces quietly retreated, allowing the Poles to take the summit unopposed the following morning.

Having dislodged the enemy from the Gustav Line, the Allies sought to keep the offensive moving and to prevent the Germans from settling into new positions on the Hitler Line. Yet by the time the British advance up the Liri valley resumed on 18–19 May, the Germans had dug in, and the Eighth Army faced a renewed round of costly frontal assaults. In the Fifth Army sector, however, the situation remained fluid. Because the Germans were withdrawing northeast away from the coast to avoid being cut off, Clark made the decision to thrust north to Fondi and Terracina to link up with the Anzio beachhead and head toward Rome rather than relieving the pressure on the Eighth Army's left flank as originally instructed. Ordering the FEC to continue its offensive on the Fifth Army right,



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*American infantrymen advancing along Highway 6 toward Rome.* (National Archives)

thereby diverting German attention from II Corps movements, Clark sent the 88th and 85th Divisions racing toward Terracina. Between 23–25 May the Allied armies pushed the Germans back along the entire front. But while the FEC and II Corps pierced the Hitler Line in several places, the Eighth Army advance up the Liri valley slowed due to stubborn enemy resistance, difficult terrain, exhaustion, and heavy casualties.

The 90,000 Allied troops of VI Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., started their offensive from the Anzio beachhead as planned on 23 May 1944. Attacking toward Cisterna, Truscott understood his ultimate objective to be the capture of Highway 6 at Valmontone. During the following three days of hard fighting by the U.S. 3d and 45th Infantry Divisions, the 1st Armored Division, and the 1st Special Service Force, VI Corps broke free of the beachhead, drove inland, and threatened to drive a wedge between the *Tenth* and *Fourteenth Armies*. In the meantime, at dawn on 24 May, a task force of motorized infantry, engineers, tanks, and self-propelled artillery from the 85th Division met a patrol of VI Corps engineers moving south from Anzio, ending the 125-day isolation of the Fifth Army beachhead. The Germans



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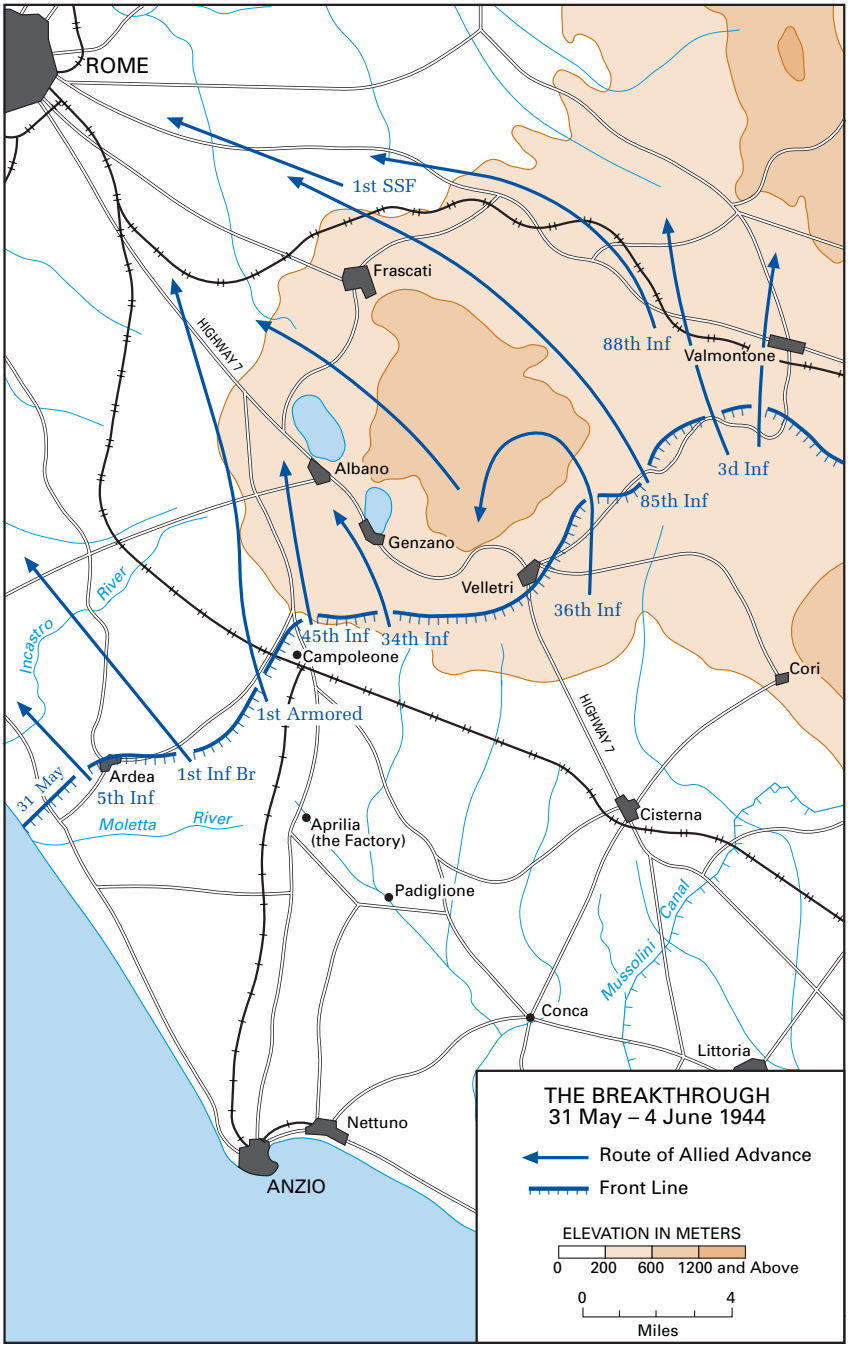


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rapidly began withdrawing to the Caesar Line, an incomplete string of fortifications extending east from the region between Anzio and Rome to a point two miles south of Valmontone.

Alexander had intended the VI Corps breakout to be the start of the second thrust aimed at destroying German resistance south of Rome. However, Clark had never accepted Alexander's view that the liberation of Rome was secondary to the destruction of the German armies in Italy. The American Fifth Army commander was now convinced that Alexander's plan to trap the enemy at Valmontone was impossible because of the heavy concentration of German troops in the area. Fearing that the Caesar Line would prove too difficult an obstacle for VI Corps, influenced by intelligence reports which indicated that the area north of Anzio was being denuded of enemy troops, and wanting Americans to liberate Rome, Clark decided to shift the bulk of VI Corps to the north for an all-out drive on the Italian capital. Brushing aside Truscott's protests, and without consulting his staff or Alexander, Clark ordered the 3d Division and 1st Special Service Force to continue toward Valmontone, but he directed the 1st Armored and the 34th, 45th, and 36th Infantry Divisions to join the northern advance of the 85th and 88th Divisions.

Some historians have argued that Clark's decision to shift the direction of the offensive allowed a significant portion of the enemy's army to escape past Valmontone, since the weakened American forces in the vicinity and the Eighth Army still struggling up the Liri valley thirty miles to the south were not capable of preventing that movement. Meanwhile, north of Anzio, the redirected Fifth Army units began to encounter increasingly stiff resistance from enemy units now dug in on the Caesar Line. Although Alexander accepted Clark's fait accompli with good grace, the Allies were unable to destroy the German armies south of Rome and possibly end the Italian campaign in June 1944. In addition, the slow progress made by the 45th and 34th Divisions between 27 and 30 May indicated the possibility of a renewed stalemate just miles south of Rome.

Yet on the evening of 27–28 May, patrols of the 36th Division scored a major coup when they discovered a gap between the *362d Infantry* and *Hermann Goering Divisions* atop Monte Artemisio. In a move which more than made up for the 36th Division's earlier failure on the Rapido, the 141st, 142d, and 143d Infantry regiments quickly occupied the heights, and artillerymen soon brought High-



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*Troops of the 85th Division enter the gates of Rome.* (National Archives)

way 6, the main German supply line, under fire at Valmontone. To General Truscott this was the turning point in the Allied drive to the north. Kesselring was furious with Mackensen for allowing the ridgeline to fall and ordered it retaken at all costs. But all of the German counterattacks failed, and when Valmontone became untenable because of American artillery fire, Mackensen was relieved of command and replaced by Lt. Gen. Joachim Lemelsen.

The new *Fourteenth Army* commander could do little to reverse the tide of events. When units of the II and VI Corps began to exploit the gap made by the 36th Division, and when the FEC and Eighth Army renewed their attacks (north of Frosinone), Kesselring was forced on 2 June to order all German units to break off contact and withdraw north. Declaring Rome an open city on 3 June, the *Tenth* and *Fourteenth Armies* conducted an orderly retreat through the city. Only the suburbs were contested. On orders from Hitler, the wholesale vandalism and demolitions that had characterized the evacuation of Naples the previous fall were not repeated.

During the night of 4 June elements of the 1st Special Service Force, 1st Armored Division, and the 3d, 34th, 36th, 85th, and 88th



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Infantry Divisions entered Rome and quickly moved north. On the following morning large numbers of Romans poured into the streets to give the long columns of American soldiers still passing through Rome a tumultuous welcome. The American troops who actually liberated the city, however, had passed through Rome during the early morning hours in darkness and near silence and were again engaging the Germans along a twenty-mile front on the Tiber River.

The liberation of Rome made headlines around the world and was greeted by the Allies with great joy. Yet the capture of this first Axis capital had a high price. Since the start of DIADEM on 11 May, the Fifth Army had suffered a total of 17,931 American casualties: 3,145 killed, 13,704 wounded, and 1,082 missing—30 percent of the total casualties suffered by the Americans since Salerno in September 1943. French and British Fifth Army casualties numbered 10,635 and 3,355 respectively. The Eighth Army counted casualties of 11,639, bringing total Allied losses during the campaign to over 43,000. German losses were estimated at 38,000, for both *Tenth* and *Fourteenth Armies*, not including 15,606 prisoners of war.

The accomplishments of the Allied armies in Italy, culminating in the capture of Rome on 5 June, were quickly overshadowed by the opening of the long-awaited second front with the Normandy invasion (OVERLORD) on 6 June 1944. Although OVERLORD was to have been supported by a simultaneous invasion of southern France (ANVIL-DRAGOON), the heavy fighting around Cassino and chronic supply and manpower shortages caused this landing to be postponed until 15 August 1944. Yet both OVERLORD and ANVIL-DRAGOON had an immediate impact on the Italian campaign by further reducing its military priority. After the liberation of Rome, the Allied forces in Italy received ever less in terms of men and materiel, confirming in the minds of many soldiers that the campaign was a holding action of secondary importance. In addition, with the Allied high command convinced that ANVIL would have a greater potential for tying down German forces in support of northwest European operations, the armies in Italy were stripped of many of their best units and equipment. By mid-July 1944 the FEC would move, along with the VI Corps headquarters and the U.S. 3d, 36th, and 45th Infantry Divisions, to the newly created Seventh Army preparing for ANVIL. By midsummer the Eighth and Fifth Armies would have only 14 divisions facing the 9 divisions of the *Fourteenth Army* in the west and the 8 divisions of the *Tenth Army* in the east.



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Two days after Rome fell, General Alexander received orders from General Wilson to push the Germans 170 miles north to a line running from Pisa to Rimini as quickly as possible to prevent the establishment of any sort of coherent enemy defense in central Italy. The Fifth Army, still fighting in the western half of the peninsula, set as its immediate goals the capture of the port of Civitavecchia and the airfields at Viterbo, with the long-range goal of seizing the triangle of Pisa-Lucca-Pistoia on the Arno River. The Eighth Army, whose front eventually extended nearly 200 miles from the interior to the Adriatic, targeted the triangle Florence-Arezzo-Bibbiena. To maintain momentum, all units were instructed to bypass enemy strongpoints, but were told to exploit any opportunity to split and destroy the *Tenth* and *Fourteenth Armies* separately before they reached the Arno.

Although Allied progress was steady, neither Fifth nor Eighth Army advanced as rapidly as planned. Civitavecchia and Viterbo fell on 7 June, with extremely light Fifth Army casualties, while the Eighth Army captured Terni and Perugia on 13 and 19 June, respectively. But the constant shifting of troops between fronts to replace units withdrawn for ANVIL, growing logistical problems, plus the ever-present rough terrain, poor weather, and sporadic but stiff enemy resistance, caused innumerable delays.

While the campaign had changed little in its most fundamental aspects, the terrain for the first 100 miles north of Rome was not nearly as favorable for the enemy's defensive purposes as that farther south. The *Fourteenth* and *Tenth Armies* did construct two defensive belts across central Italy, the Dora and Trasimeno (Frieda) Lines, in the attempt to halt or at least slow the Allied advance, but both were overrun by the end of June. Despite increasing resistance Allied casualties were low, and by 21 June the Germans had been pushed 110 miles north of Rome, a stunning advance compared to the five months of agonizingly slow and bloody gains the previous spring. Alexander optimistically predicted in late June that at that rate of advance the Allies could take Leghorn, Ancona, and Bologna within weeks and be in the Po valley by late summer, ready for an assault into Austria and the Danube valley.

In spite of the handicaps posed by growing shortages and obstacles presented by the enemy, the Fifth and Eighth Armies continued to advance. Cecina fell to the 34th Division on 1 July, after some of the heaviest fighting seen since before Rome. The FEC



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*American patrols entering Pisa.* (National Archives)

captured Siena on 3 July, and Volterra fell on 8 July to the 1st Armored Division. The newly arrived U.S. 91st Infantry Division, under Maj. Gen. William G. Livesay, entered action for the first time on 12 July and helped the 34th and 88th Infantry Divisions and the U.S. Japanese-American 442d Regimental Combat Team capture the port of Leghorn on 19 July before reaching the banks of the Arno with the rest of the Fifth Army on 23 July. On the Eighth Army front, the Polish Corps captured the vital port of Ancona on 18 July, while the British 13 Corps began its advance on Florence, taking that city on 5 August.

Having failed to stem the Allied advance between Rome and the Arno, Field Marshal Kesselring was not optimistic that his battered, mixed force of infantry, armored, *Luftwaffe*, and foreign



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*"Roman Holiday" by Mitchell Siporin.* (Army Art Collection)



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units could halt any Allied thrust short of the Gothic Line north of Florence and the Arno. His concern was exacerbated by the fact that the Gothic Line was not scheduled for completion until December 1944. Yet late in July and early in August Alexander, Clark, and Leese called a halt in offensive operations to allow Allied units, many of which had been in continuous action since May, to rest, refit, and prepare for a late-summer assault on the Gothic Line. The midsummer halt provided a much-needed breather for the Germans as well, who now redoubled their efforts to complete their Gothic Line defenses. It was during this lull in activity, as both sides prepared for what would be the final battles of the war, that the Rome-Arno Campaign officially ended.

## *Analysis*

The Allied operations in Italy between January and September 1944 were essentially an infantryman's war where the outcome was decided by countless bitterly fought small unit actions waged over some of Europe's most difficult terrain under some of the worst weather conditions found anywhere during World War II. Given such circumstances, the growing Allied superiority in materiel, especially in armored and air forces, was of little consequence, and ground troops were forced to carry out repeated, costly frontal assaults that quickly turned the campaign into a war of attrition on a battlefield where the terrain heavily favored the defense. Chronic shortages of troops and materiel throughout 1944 exacerbated the already difficult tactical situation in Italy and became worse as the year wore on, ensuring that the limited Allied forces available would not obtain a quick, decisive victory, but would rather slowly grind down their well-entrenched and determined enemies.

The Allied air forces aided ground operations by providing close air support and by disrupting enemy supply lines and communications, but their efforts were not decisive as demonstrated during the bombings of Monte Cassino and Operation STRANGLE.

To critics of the Allied effort in Italy, the repeated ill-fated attempts to open the Liri valley, resulting in the disaster on the Rapido and the three costly assaults on Monte Cassino, as well as the desperate Anzio gamble, all indicated a lack of imagination on the part of both British and American commanders. Allied commanders, however, were limited in their options considering the political, logistical, and geographical aspects of the campaign.



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It is difficult to justify the heavy investment of Allied lives and materiel into the Mediterranean theater during 1944. The Italian campaign, which the Americans had always considered a subsidiary effort, had become for both sides a major drain of men and materiel, especially after the liberation of Rome, when Operations OVERLORD and ANVIL reduced the theater to secondary importance within the overall Allied strategy. While the Allies did tie down a significant number of enemy divisions in Italy, it was often not apparent during 1944 whether it was the Allies or the Germans who were actually doing the tying down.

Even though hundreds of miles of territory had been liberated by the summer of 1944, the Rome-Arno Campaign did not end the war of attrition. The multinational Allied armies in Italy faced a further nine months of campaigning, under conditions similar to those they had endured during the previous year.



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# Further Readings

For a campaign overview see Carlo D'Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean, 1942–1945* (1990). Specific accounts of the Anzio landing and Rapido crossing are in William L. Allen, *Anzio: Edge of Disaster* (1978); and Martin Blumenson, *Anzio: The Gamble That Failed* (1963), and *Bloody River: The Real Tragedy of the Rapido* (1970). Monte Cassino is the subject of John Ellis, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory* (1984), and David Hapgood, Monte Cassino (1984). For Operation DIADEM see W. G. F. Jackson, *The Battle for Rome* (1969), and Raleigh Trevelyan, *Rome '44: The Battle for the Eternal City* (1982). For the official view see General Sir Henry M. Wilson, *Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Italian Campaign, 8 January 1944–10 May 1944* (1946); Fifth Army, *The Advance on Rome of the Fifth Army* (1944); *Fifth Army History*, volumes 3 to 5 (1945); and Mediterranean Allied Air Forces, *Air Power in the Mediterranean, November 1942 to February 1945* (1945). The most comprehensive volumes on the Italian campaign remain Martin Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino* (1969), and Ernest F. Fisher, Jr., *Cassino to the Alps* (1977), both in the U.S. Army in World War II series published by the U.S. Army Center of Military History.

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Cover: *Romans line the streets as American armor rolls by the Coliseum.* (National Archives)

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