

ANZIO



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.

GORDON R. SULLIVAN
General, United States Army
Chief of Staff

Anzio

22 January–24 May 1944

During the early morning hours of 22 January 1944, troops of the Fifth Army swarmed ashore on a fifteen-mile stretch of Italian beach near the prewar resort towns of Anzio and Nettuno. The landings were carried out so flawlessly and German resistance was so light that British and American units gained their first day's objectives by noon, moving three to four miles inland by nightfall. The ease of the landing and the swift advance were noted by one paratrooper of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne Division, who recalled that D-day at Anzio was sunny and warm, making it very hard to believe that a war was going on and that he was in the middle of it.

The location of the Allied landings, thirty miles south of Rome and fifty-five miles northwest of the main line of resistance running from Minturno on the Tyrrhenian Sea to Ortona on the Adriatic, surprised local German commanders, who had been assured by their superiors that an amphibious assault would not take place during January or February. Thus when the landing occurred the Germans were unprepared to react offensively. Within a week, however, as Allied troops consolidated their positions and prepared to break out of the beachhead, the Germans gathered troops to eliminate what Adolf Hitler called the "Anzio abscess." The next four months would see some of the most savage fighting of World War II.

Strategic Setting

Following the successful Allied landings at Calabria, Taranto, and Salerno in early September 1943 and the unconditional surrender of Italy that same month, German forces had quickly disarmed their former allies and begun a slow, fighting withdrawal to the north. Defending two hastily prepared, fortified belts stretching from coast to coast, the Germans significantly slowed the Allied advance before settling into the Gustav Line, a third, more formidable and sophisticated defensive belt of interlocking positions on the high ground along the peninsula's narrowest point. The Germans intended to fight for every portion of this line, set in

the rugged Apennine Mountains overlooking scores of rain-soaked valleys, marshes, and rivers. The terrain favored the defense and, as elsewhere in Italy, was not conducive to armored warfare. *Luftwaffe* Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, whom Hitler had appointed as commander of all German forces in Italy on 6 November 1943, promised to hold the Gustav Line for at least six months. As long as the line was maintained it prevented the Fifth Army from advancing into the Liri valley, the most logical and direct route to the major Allied objective of Rome. The validity of Kesselring's strategy was demonstrated repeatedly between October 1943 and January 1944 as the Allies launched numerous costly attacks against well-entrenched enemy forces.

The idea for an amphibious operation near Rome had originated in late October 1943 when it became obvious that the Germans were going to fight for the entire peninsula rather than withdraw to northern Italy. The Allied advance following the Salerno invasion was proving so arduous, due to poor weather, rough terrain, and stiffening resistance, that General Dwight D. Eisenhower pessimistically told the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff that there would be very hard and bitter fighting before the Allies could hope to reach Rome. As a result, Allied planners were looking for ways to break out of the costly struggle for each ridge and valley, which was consuming enormous numbers of men and scarce supplies.

When the British conducted a successful amphibious operation at Termoli on 2–3 October, landing behind German positions on the Adriatic front, hopes were raised that a similar, larger assault south of Rome could outflank the Gustav Line. Such an operation could facilitate a breakthrough along the main line of resistance in the south and cut German lines of retreat, supply, and communications. On 8 November British General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, commander of the 15th Army Group (consisting of the Fifth and Eighth Armies under Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark and General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, respectively), passed down orders to Clark from the Combined Chiefs of Staff. They directed him to formulate a plan for landing a single division at Anzio (code-named Operation SHINGLE) on 20 December 1943 as part of a projected three-pronged Allied offensive. The subsequent lack of progress, however, and a chronic shortage of troops and shipping due to the ongoing buildup for the cross-Channel invasion of France (OVERLORD), soon made the initial landing date impractical.

The entire Anzio operation was shelved on 18 December. But changes in the Mediterranean theater command structure would soon lead to its resuscitation.

General Eisenhower formally relinquished command of Allied forces in the Mediterranean to General Sir Henry M. Wilson in early January 1944. Previously, Mediterranean strategy had been driven largely by U.S. Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, the leading spokesman in the Combined Chiefs of Staff, who had frequently communicated directly with his American subordinate. When Eisenhower left to prepare for Operation OVERLORD, however, Marshall lost this ability to influence Mediterranean events as planning responsibility passed to Britain's Sir Alan Brooke and the British Chiefs of Staff. General Wilson's largely British command resurrected the Anzio plan with his superior's approval. Heavily influenced by Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill, the British Chiefs of Staff continued to advocate a large Mediterranean effort as part of the "soft underbelly" or "peripheral" approach to defeating Nazi Germany. To Churchill the quick liberation of Rome offered the key to the success of this strategy and the rapid capture of Rome implicitly required a landing at Anzio. Churchill prevailed upon the Americans in early January 1944 to delay further transfers of amphibious shipping from the Mediterranean to England so that a landing could take place in Italy by the end of the month.

The landing was scheduled tentatively for late January 1944. Anzio was selected because it was considered the best site within striking distance of Rome but still within range of Allied aircraft operating from Naples. The initial beachhead was to be fifteen miles wide by seven miles deep. The terrain at Anzio consisted of rolling, often wooded farm country on a narrow coastal plain extending north from the town of Terracina to across the Tiber River. The entire region was part of an elaborate reclamation and resettlement project that had been undertaken by Mussolini to showcase Fascist agricultural improvements and was studded with pumping stations and farmhouses and crisscrossed by irrigation ditches and canals.

Twenty miles inland from Anzio on the approach to Rome were the Alban Hills, around whose southwest side ran Highway 7, a major north-south route. To the southeast of the Alban Hills was the Velletri Gap leading inland to another main north-south route, Highway 6, at Valmontone. East of the Velletri Gap were the Lepini

Mountains along whose southeastern edge ran the Pontine Marshes extending to Terracina. The proposed beachhead was bounded in the north by the Moletta and Incastro Rivers, in the center by open fields leading to the villages of Padiglione and Aprilia along the Anzio-Albano Road, and in the south by the villages of Cisterna and Littoria, a provincial capital, and the Mussolini Canal.

The operations at Anzio were to be supported by a general 15th Army Group offensive. One week before the Anzio assault, the Fifth Army, consisting of the U.S. II Corps, the British 10 Corps, and the French Expeditionary Corps, would launch a massive offensive on the Gustav Line, cross the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers, strike the German *Tenth Army* under Lt. Gen. Heinrich von Vietinghoff in the area of Cassino, breach the enemy line there, push up the Liri valley, and link up with the forces at Anzio for the drive on Rome. Meanwhile, Allied, British, and Commonwealth forces of the Eighth Army were ordered to break through on the Adriatic front or at least tie down German forces to prevent their transfer to the Anzio area.

General Clark designated Maj. Gen. John P. Lucas, U.S. Army, commander of the Fifth Army's VI Corps, to lead the invasion and gave him two missions. First, Lucas was to divert enemy strength from the south and, in anticipation of a swift and violent enemy reaction, to prepare defensive positions. The vague second portion of his orders directed him to move toward the Alban Hills and points east for the link-up with the remainder of the Fifth Army on D-day plus 7. In what became a source of continued controversy, neither American interpreted these orders as specifically charging VI Corps with the immediate capture of the Alban Hills. That attitude reflected Clark's and Lucas' skepticism regarding the largely British plan and the feasibility of the overall Anzio operation. Clark in particular had been enthusiastic about the Anzio plan in its early stages, but he became increasingly pessimistic after learning that only two divisions were available for the operation. Both men expected that the assault troops would have to fight their way ashore against fierce resistance. They strongly doubted whether the small force could survive even the initial German counterattacks anticipated on D-day, let alone establish a viable beachhead. The notion that these troops could also take and hold the Alban Hills soon after landing, as implied by the British, seemed overly optimistic. Under the circumstances Clark wanted to remain flexible, and he

encouraged Lucas to do the same, leaving the decision about how far and how fast to advance to the VI Corps commander.

By the time the plans for Operation SHINGLE were finalized on 8 January, with D-day scheduled for 22 January 1944, the landing had evolved from a small, subsidiary attack into a major offensive operation behind enemy lines. For the initial assault Clark selected a combined Anglo-American force then gathering in Naples. Since the Allies wanted to land the largest possible contingent that available amphibious assault shipping allowed, the invasion force consisted of the U.S. 3d Infantry Division; the British 1st Infantry Division and 46th Royal Tank Regiment; the U.S. 751st Tank Battalion, the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82d Airborne Division, and the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion; two British Commando battalions; and three battalions of U.S. Army Rangers. The U.S. 45th Infantry Division and Combat Command A (CCA), a regimental-size unit of the U.S. 1st Armored Division, were directed to land as reinforcements once the beachhead was established.

The XII Tactical Air Command, the British Desert Air Force, the Coastal Air Force, and the Tactical Bomber Force, units which were supporting Allied operations throughout the entire Mediterranean theater, were directed to conduct major air assaults in support of the Anzio landings. The approximately 2,600 available Allied aircraft were to gain air superiority over the beach, provide close air support for the invading forces, and destroy enemy airfields and hinder communications. The 64th Fighter Wing was charged with protecting the battle area during the actual landings from some 2,000 German aircraft believed to be stationed in Italy and the Balkans.

To move, protect, and assist the assault forces, the Allies assembled a naval flotilla comprising vessels from six nations. Task Force 81, commanded by U.S. Rear Adm. Frank J. Lowry, contained over 250 combat-loaded vessels and amphibious assault craft of all sizes and descriptions. Admiral Lowry also commanded the 74 vessels of Task Force X-Ray, assigned to see American forces safely ashore and to support their beachhead operations, while Admiral Thomas H. Troubridge, Royal Navy, commanded the 52 ships of Task Force Peter, which was to carry, land, and support the British contingents. To obtain surprise, the Allies decided to dispense with a long preliminary naval bombardment, planning instead on a short and intense ten-minute barrage by two British assault vessels equipped with 1,500 5-inch rockets. As a diversion-



The Anzio-Nettuno area. (National Archives)

ary move, other naval units were ordered to shell the coastal town of Civitavecchia, forty miles to the north.

The Allies launched their offensive in the south on 12 January 1944, with the French Expeditionary Corps assaulting Cassino and the British 10 Corps attempting to exploit previous gains on the Garigliano River. Neither attack succeeded in breaking through the Gustav Line, although limited progress was made. One week later, on 20 January, the U.S. II Corps attacked in the center of the Fifth Army front, attempting to cross the Rapido River. After two days of bitter fighting and heavy losses, the II Corps' 36th Infantry Division was forced to break off its attack. The assault on the Gustav Line, the lynch-pin of the Allied plan of which Anzio was a part, had bogged down. In the meantime, farther south, the elaborate air and sea precautions taken to mask and protect the Anzio landing force were completed. The armada set sail from Naples on 21 January.

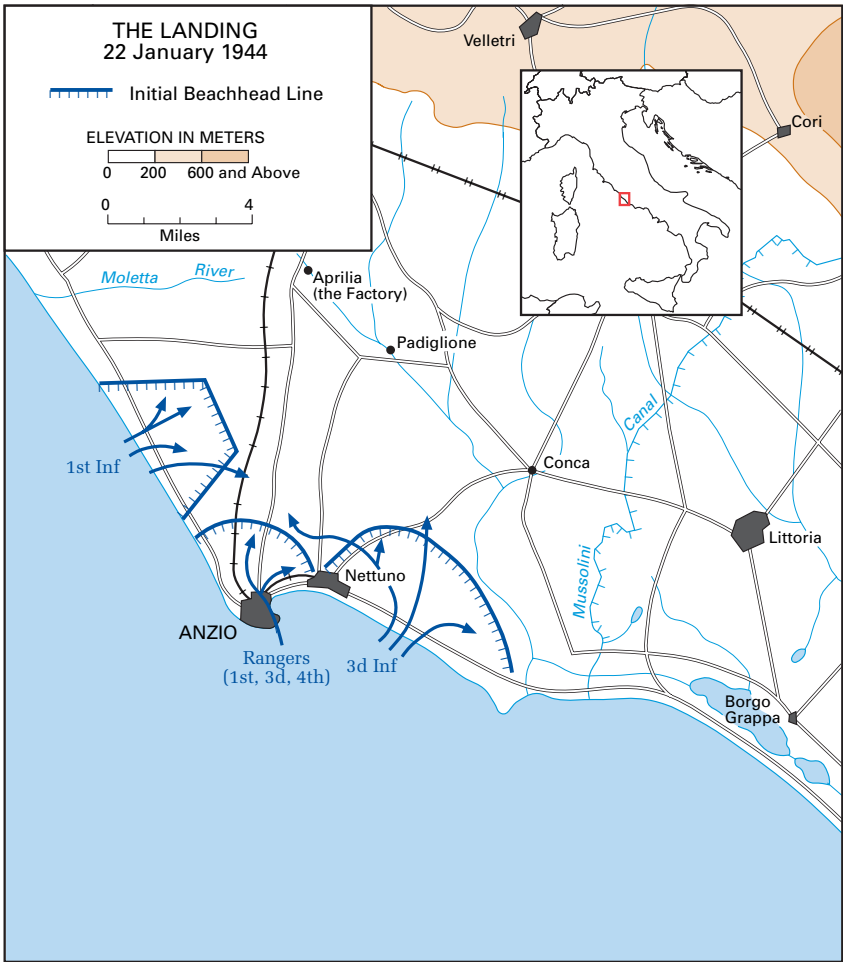
Operations

The Anzio invasion began at 0200 on 22 January 1944 and achieved, General Lucas recalled, one of the most complete surprises in history. The Germans had already sent their regional re-

serves south to counter the Allied attacks on the Garigliano on 18 January, leaving one nine-mile stretch of beach at Anzio defended by a single company. The first Allied waves landed unopposed and moved rapidly inland. On the southern flank of the beachhead the 3d Division quickly seized its initial objectives, brushing aside a few dazed patrols, while unopposed British units achieved equal success in the center and north. Simultaneously, Rangers occupied Anzio, and the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion seized Nettuno. All VI Corps objectives were taken by noon as the Allied air forces completed 1,200 sorties against targets in and around the beachhead. On the beach itself, the U.S. 36th Engineer Combat Regiment bulldozed exits, laid corduroy roads, cleared mines, and readied the port of Anzio to receive its first landing ship, tank (LST), an amphibious assault and supply ship, by the afternoon of D-day. By midnight over 36,000 men and 3,200 vehicles, 90 percent of the invasion force, were ashore with casualties of 13 killed, 97 wounded, and 44 missing. During D-day Allied troops captured 227 German defenders.

Allied units continued to push inland over the next few days to a depth of seven miles against scattered but increasing German resistance. In the center of the beachhead, on 24 January, the British 1st Division began to move up the Anzio-Albano Road toward Campoleone and, with help from the 179th Infantry Regiment of the 45th Infantry Division, captured the town of Aprilia, known as “the Factory” because of its cluster of brick buildings, on 25 January. Within three days the continuing Anglo-American drive pushed the Germans a further 1.5 miles north of the Factory, created a huge bulge in enemy lines, but failed to break out of the beachhead. Probes by the 3d Division toward Cisterna and by the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment toward Littoria on 24–25 January made some progress but were also halted short of their goals by stubborn resistance. Renewed attacks on the next day brought the Americans within three miles of Cisterna and two miles beyond the west branch of the Mussolini Canal. But the 3d Division commander, Maj. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., on orders of the corps commander, called a halt to the offensive, a pause that later lengthened into a general consolidation and reorganization of beachhead forces between 26 and 29 January.

Meanwhile, the Allied troop and materiel buildup had proceeded at a breakneck pace. Despite continuous German artillery and air harassment, a constant fact of life throughout the campaign,



the Allies off-loaded twenty-one cargo ships and landed 6,350 tons of materiel on 29 January alone, and on 1 February the port of Anzio went into full operation. Improving air defenses downed ninety-seven attacking *Luftwaffe* aircraft prior to 1 February, but the Germans did succeed in sinking one destroyer and a hospital ship, as well as destroying significant stocks of supplies piled on the crowded beaches. Mindful of the need for reinforcements, Lucas ordered ashore the rest of the 45th Infantry Division and remaining portions of the 1st Armored Division allotted to the Anzio operation, raising the total number of Allied soldiers in the beachhead to 61,332.



Preloaded supply trucks and DUKWs at Naples. (National Archives)

The Germans had not been idle during the week after the Anzio landing. The *German Armed Forces High Command (OKW)* in Berlin was surprised at the location of the landing and the efficiency with which it was carried out. Although they had considered such an attack probable for some time and had made preliminary plans for meeting it, Kesselring and his local commanders were powerless to repel the invasion immediately because of the lack of adequate reserves. Nevertheless, German reaction to the Anzio landing was swift and ultimately would prove far more powerful than anything the Allies had anticipated.

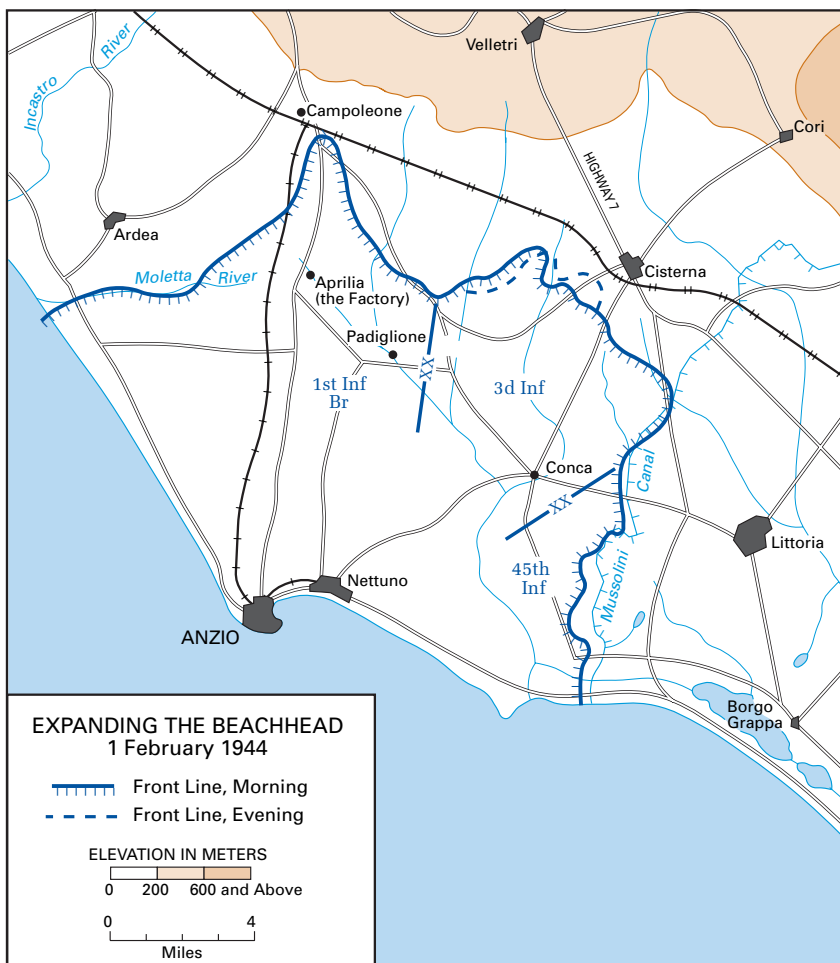
Upon receiving word of the landings, Kesselring immediately dispatched elements of the *4th Parachute* and *Hermann Goering Divisions* south from the Rome area to defend the roads leading north from the Alban Hills. Within the next twenty-four hours Hitler dispatched other units to Italy from Yugoslavia, France, and Germany to reinforce elements of the *3d Panzer Grenadier* and *71st Infantry Divisions* that were already moving into the Anzio area. By the end of D-day, thousands of German troops were converging on Anzio, despite delays caused by Allied air attacks.



Men and equipment move ashore south of Anzio on D-day. (National Archives)

OKW, Kesselring, and Brig. Gen. Siegfried Westphal, Kesselring's chief of staff, were astonished that the Anzio forces had not exploited their unopposed landing with an immediate thrust into the virtually undefended Alban Hills on 23–24 January. As Westphal later recounted, there were no significant German units between Anzio and Rome, and he speculated that an imaginative, bold strike by enterprising forces could easily have penetrated into the interior or sped straight up Highways 6 and 7 to Rome. Instead, Westphal recalled, the enemy forces lost time and hesitated. As the Germans later discovered, General Lucas was neither bold nor imaginative, and he erred repeatedly on the side of caution, to the increasing chagrin of both Alexander and Clark.

By 24 January Kesselring, confident that he had gathered sufficient forces to contain the beachhead, transferred the *Fourteenth Army* headquarters under General Eberhard von Mackensen from Verona in northern Italy to Anzio. Mackensen soon controlled elements of 8 divisions, totaling 40,000 troops, with 5 more divisions on the way. Seeking to prevent a permanent Allied foothold at Anzio, Kesselring ordered a counterattack for 28 January, but Mackensen requested and received a postponement until 1 February to await further reinforcements, especially armored units that were being held up by Allied air attacks. Two days before the scheduled offensive, the *Fourteenth Army* numbered about 70,000



combat troops, most already deployed in forward staging areas, with several thousand more on the way.

Racing against the expected German counterattack, both the Fifth and Eighth Armies prepared to renew their stalled offensives in the south. Lucas meanwhile planned a two-pronged attack for 30 January. While one force cut Highway 7 at Cisterna before moving east into the Alban Hills, a second was to advance northeast up the Albano Road, break through the Campoleone salient, and exploit the gap by moving to the west and southwest. A quick link-up with Fifth Army forces in the south was believed



Isola Bella and Cisterna. (National Archives)

still possible even though German resistance all along the perimeter of the beachhead was becoming stronger.

The 3d Division and the 1st, 3d, and 4th Ranger Battalions under Col. William O. Darby were responsible for the initial attack on Cisterna. The 1st and 3d Rangers were to spearhead the assault by infiltrating the German lines and seizing and holding Cisterna until the 4th Rangers and 15th Infantry, 3d Division, arrived via the Conca-Cisterna Road. Meanwhile, at 0200, 30 January, the 7th Infantry, 3d Division, was to push on the left to a point above Cisterna and cut Highway 7, while the 15th Infantry passed to the right of Cisterna and cut the highway south of town. As a diversion the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment would attack along the Mussolini Canal. Unknown to the Americans, their assault was aimed directly at the center of the area where thirty-six enemy battalions were massing for their 1 February counterattack.

The Rangers moved out at 0130 to the right of the Conca-Cisterna Road and by dawn were within 800 yards of Cisterna. But German soldiers of the *715th Motorized Infantry Division* discovered the lightly armed Ranger force during the night and sprang a devastating ambush at first light. Heavy fighting broke out and the Rangers were pinned down quickly by an enemy superior in arms

and numbers. Efforts by the 4th Rangers and 15th Infantry to rescue the beleaguered units failed, and by noon armored units of the *Hermann Goering Division* had forced the Rangers into the open. The Americans had only grenades and bazookas for antitank weapons, and as they attempted a fighting withdrawal in small and scattered groups they were cut down mercilessly. Of the 767 men in the two battalions, only 6 eventually returned to Allied lines.

In spite of the disaster that befell the Rangers, the 7th and 15th Infantry regiments continued their attacks toward Cisterna, one soldier recalling that the defenders clung stubbornly to their entrenched positions while launching locally heavy counterattacks. Sgt. Truman O. Olson, a light machine gunner with Company B, 7th Infantry, took part in one sixteen-hour assault on entrenched enemy positions in which one-third of his company became casualties. Having seized a toehold, the survivors dug in while Sergeant Olson and his crew took their one available machine gun and placed it forward of the line to bear the brunt of an expected enemy counterattack. Although he had been firing without respite all day, Olson stuck grimly to his post throughout the night while his gun crew was killed, one by one, by accurate and overwhelming enemy fire. Weary from over twenty-four hours of continuous battle and suffering from an arm wound, Olson manned his gun alone, meeting the full force of a 200-man enemy dawn assault supported by mortars and machine guns. After thirty minutes of fighting, Olson was severely wounded, but he refused evacuation. For an hour and a half after receiving a second and subsequently fatal wound, he continued to fire his machine gun, killing at least twenty of the enemy, wounding many more, and ultimately forcing the attackers to withdraw. For his actions Sergeant Olson was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

While some progress was made by 3d Division units in the face of noticeably stronger enemy resistance, by nightfall on 31 January the Americans were still one mile from the village, battling stubbornly forward but unable to break through. On the following day fighting was equally inconclusive, and by noon it had become obvious, after three days of costly attacks and counterattacks, that the Americans could not capture Cisterna, still 1,500 yards away. Heeding intelligence reports delivered on 2 February, which indicated the arrival of new German units in the Anzio area and an imminent enemy counterattack, Truscott, on the orders of Clark and Lucas, again told his command to dig in.

The other prong of the Allied attack launched by the British 1st Division and CCA, 1st Armored Division, toward Campoleone and the Alban Hills initially fared little better. Rain-soaked terrain, fierce enemy fire, and ubiquitous minefields slowed CCA's advance, and by nightfall on 30 January the unit was still struggling to reach its line of departure. The British succeeded in advancing two miles the first day, but they also failed to breach the German defenses. General Lucas changed plans for the second day of the attack and ordered the British to breach the enemy line along the Albano Road at Campoleone for exploitation by CCA. During the next two days the Allies reached Campoleone, penetrated the German main line, and opened a two-mile-wide gap. But the exhausted Allied troops were unable to exploit their success, and the drive ground to a halt.

The failure of the Allied breakout attempt, stymied by stiff resistance, convinced Alexander, Clark, and Lucas that an enemy counterattack must be in the offing. Reinforcements were rushed to Anzio, including 1,800 men of the American-Canadian 1st Special Service Force, elements of the British 56th Division, and additional anti-aircraft and artillery units, raising the total number of Allied soldiers in the beachhead to 100,000.

Despite these additions, the *Fourteenth Army* outnumbered the Allies at Anzio by 4 February. But the German force was a hodgepodge of rapidly thrown together units. All were critically short of ammunition, training, qualified leaders, and reserves. Allied air attacks had disrupted communications, hampered troop and supply movements, and caused morale problems. From the outset Mackensen had doubted the available force could eliminate the Anzio beachhead, but he prepared a forceful counterattack nonetheless. The *4th Parachute* and *65th Infantry Divisions* of the *I Parachute Corps* were to pinch off the Campoleone salient and recapture the Factory at Aprilia. The same units would then break through to the sea along the Albano Road. Elsewhere the *LXXVI Panzer Corps*, consisting of the *3d Panzer Grenadier*, *715th Motorized Infantry*, *71st Infantry*, *Hermann Goering*, and *26th Panzer Divisions* would attack south of Cisterna along the Mussolini Canal and attempt to breach the Allied perimeter and advance on Nettuno and Anzio.

The counterattack opened with an artillery barrage on 3–4 February, followed by armored and infantry assaults which smashed into the partially prepared British 1st Division defenses in



“The Factory.” (National Archives)

the Campoleone salient. The British held, despite suffering 1,400 casualties, but their dangerously exposed position prompted Lucas to order their withdrawal to one mile north of the Factory and Carroceto on the night of 4–5 February, a retreat of about 2.5 miles. Although the salient was eliminated, the Germans failed to break the Allied line or retake the Factory. The undulating and soggy Albano Road area was just as inhospitable to German armor and infantry as it had been to Allied forces the week before. However, the critical situation the Germans created in the Allied center convinced Lucas to form a beachhead defense line running from the Moletta River in the north, through the fields of the central sector, to the Mussolini Canal in the south. He issued orders to all Allied troops that this was the final line of resistance to be held at all costs—the shallow beachhead precluded any further retreat.

The Germans renewed their attacks on 7 February in the weakened British 1st Division sector and, in two days of bitter fighting, pushed the British troops from the Factory and Carroceto. Although battered and exhausted, they managed to maintain a coherent line and were reinforced on 10 February by the 1st Armored Regiment, CCA, 1st Armored Division (itself at 50 percent strength), the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and the 179th and 157th regiments of

the U.S. 45th Infantry Division. Ordered to counterattack and retake Aprilia on 11 February, the 179th Infantry and 191st Tank Battalion began a two-pronged attack seeking to outflank the Germans holding the Factory. In two days of costly, hand-to-hand fighting, the Americans failed to retake the lost ground, but inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. Lucas still expected further attacks in the weakened central sector and removed the British 1st Division from the line, replacing it with the British 56th and U.S. 45th Infantry Divisions. As an added precaution, VI Corps artillery was strengthened and Allied tactical air attacks were stepped up.

Spurred by the elimination of the Campoleone salient, the Germans continued their counterattack on 16 February by moving down the Anzio-Albano Road on a four-mile front. The brunt of the assault hit the 45th Division sectors held by the 157th and 179th Infantry regiments. The initial attacks by the *3d Panzer Grenadier* and *715th Motorized Infantry Divisions* were beaten back with heavy losses, allowing only minor penetrations, while the 180th Infantry rebuffed lighter attacks. Just before midnight, however, enemy persistence paid off. A gap was created between the 179th and 157th Infantry, which was promptly exploited by three German regiments supported by sixty tanks. By dawn the Germans had driven a two-by-one-mile wedge in the center of the 45th Division and were poised to break the Allied line, threatening the entire beachhead. Compounding the already critical situation, the 179th Infantry attempted to withdraw in full view of the enemy the following afternoon and suffered heavy casualties. All through 16–17 February the Allies scrambled to plug the gap with hastily redeployed 90-mm. antiaircraft guns, naval gunfire, and units of the 1st Armored Division. The XII Tactical Air Command flew 730 ground support sorties and later claimed that the total weight of bombs dropped and the number of bombers employed was the greatest ever allotted up to that date in direct support of ground forces.

The Germans launched a more intense assault against the 45th Division at dawn on 18 February and destroyed one battalion of the 179th Infantry before pushing the remainder of the unit back a half mile farther to Lucas' final defensive line by midmorning. Fearing that the 179th Infantry was in danger of giving way, Lucas ordered Col. William O. Darby to take command of the unit and allow no further retreat. The regiment held, later counting 500 dead Germans in front of its positions. Elsewhere, the 180th and 157th regiments also held their positions in spite of heavy losses



during three days of German attacks. By midday, Allied air and artillery superiority had turned the tide. When the Germans launched a final afternoon assault against the 180th and 179th regiments, it was halted by air strikes and massed mortar, machine gun, artillery, and tank fire. Subsequent enemy attacks on 19 and 20 February were noticeably weaker and were broken up by the same combination of Allied arms before ground contact was made. The crisis had passed, and while harassing attacks continued until 22 February, VI Corps went over to the offensive locally and succeeded in retaking some lost ground.

The Germans could ill afford the loss of the 5,389 men killed, wounded, and missing during their five-day counterattack. Enemy troop morale plummeted, and many units lost their offensive capability. The *65th Infantry Division's* combat strength had dropped to 673 effectives by 23 February, and one regiment of the *715th Motorized Infantry Division* numbered fewer than 185 men. Allied casualties numbered some 3,496 killed, wounded, or missing in addition to 1,637 nonbattle casualties from trench foot, exposure, and combat exhaustion. Allied commanders at Anzio often claimed that losses would have been lower if soldiers were periodically rotated away from the lines, but replacements simply were not available. All 96,401 Allied soldiers were required to hold the 35-mile perimeter against an estimated ten German divisions in the *Fourteenth Army*, totaling 120,000 men by 12 February.

Despite the fact that their drive to eliminate the Anzio beachhead with an attack down the Albano Road had failed, the Germans resumed the offensive on 29 February. This time their main effort was directed against the U.S. 3d Division holding the Cisterna sector of the Allied beachhead. The *LXXVI Panzer Corps*, consisting of the *114th Light Infantry*, *362d Infantry*, *26th Panzer*, and *Hermann Goering Divisions* began a drive to breach the outer beachhead defenses from Carano to Isola Bella, which, if successful, would be exploited by the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division* all the way to Nettuno and Anzio. The Americans, however, had anticipated this move. General Truscott, who had replaced Lucas as VI Corps commander on 23 February, had reinforced the line with additional artillery. Further, he made certain that each unit had at least one battalion in reserve with additional reinforcements available at the corps level.

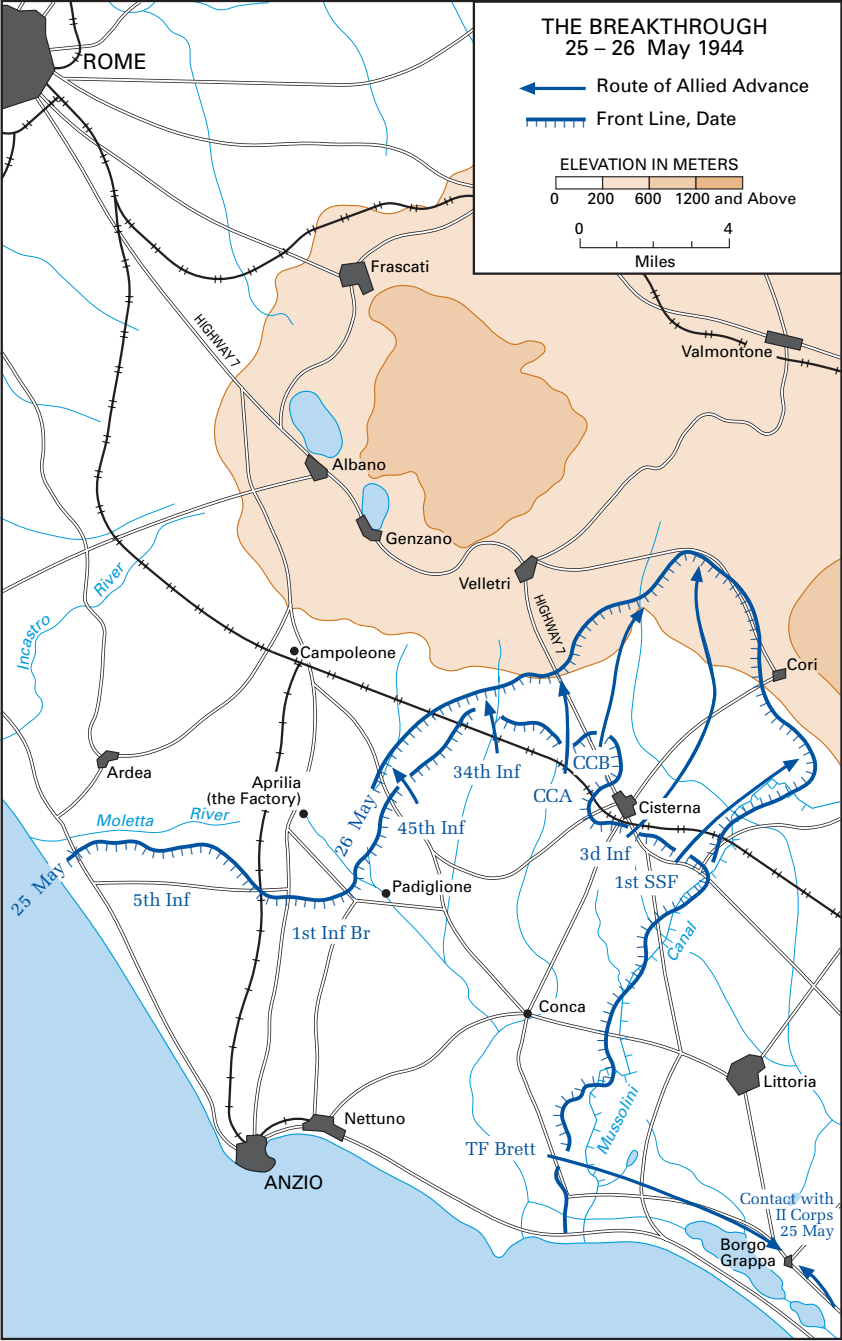
At midnight, 28 February, German artillery signaled the commencement of the new attack. But VI Corps and 3d Division artillery responded in mass, returning twenty shells for each one fired by the Germans, expending 66,000 rounds on 29 February alone. When the enemy infantry advanced at dawn at a half-dozen points along the 3d Division front, only one attack made any progress, penetrating 800 yards northeast of Carano before being halted with heavy losses. The other attacks fared less well amid a hail of American artillery and mortar fire. Attacking on too broad a front, the Germans lacked the overwhelming strength needed to break through anywhere, and by the end of the day they had barely dented the American line. Over the next several days, the well-en-

trenched Americans, supported by closely coordinated artillery, armor, and air support, shattered subsequent German attacks. Even though the 7th and 15th Infantry regiments and the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion often were hard pressed and suffered heavy losses between 1 and 4 March at the hands of the *715th* and the *16th SS Panzer Grenadier Divisions*, all three units held their positions and beat back successive enemy assaults. The Germans continued to seek a breakthrough, but their efforts gradually weakened. Mackensen realized that the *Fourteenth Army* had spent itself in a costly and futile offensive after a last German assault failed on 4 March.

The final five-day German counterattack cost 3,500 men killed, wounded, and missing, plus thirty tanks destroyed. It had failed to eliminate the beachhead, and 3d Division counterattacks quickly reclaimed all territory. From then, the Germans went over to the defensive, clearly incapable of mounting any further serious offensive action.

After six weeks of continuous bombing, shelling, and fighting, the men of the VI Corps were as exhausted as their German adversaries. Following the collapse of the final enemy drive on 4 March, a three-month lull began. During this time both armies limited their operations to defending the positions they held at the beginning of March, while they conducted limited counterattacks and raids and marked time until the renewal of offensive operations on the southern front. Although the reinforced *Fourteenth Army*, totaling 135,698 troops by 15 March, considered another offensive, plans were shelved in early April in favor of conserving troop strength to counter an expected Allied spring offensive.

The VI Corps spent this time reorganizing and regrouping as well. The British 56th Division was relieved by the British 5th Division while Commando, Ranger, and parachute units were sent to England to begin preparations for OVERLORD. The U.S. 34th Infantry Division took up positions before Cisterna on 28 March, replacing the 3d Division, which had seen sixty-seven days of continuous front-line action and now reverted to corps reserve. Over 14,000 replacements arrived to fill other depleted Allied units, bringing VI Corps to its full combat strength of 90,000 men in six divisions. In preparation for its role in the spring offensive, VI Corps received Combat Command B (CCB) of the U.S. 1st Armored Division, giving the beachhead forces a complete armored division.



On 22 May the entire U.S. 36th Infantry Division landed, bringing the total number of Allied troops at Anzio to seven full divisions.

During March, all of April, and the first part of May 1944, recalled one veteran, the Anzio beachhead resembled the Western Front during World War I. The vast majority of Allied casualties during this period were from air and artillery attacks, including fire from "Anzio Annie," a 280-mm. German railway gun which fired from the Alban Hills. During March, shrapnel caused 83 percent of all 3d Division casualties, and other units experienced similar rates. The Anzio beachhead became a honeycomb of wet and muddy trenches, foxholes, and dugouts. Yet the Allied troops made the best of a bad situation, and one soldier recalled that during these months the fighting was light and living was leisurely.

Supply problems at Anzio, originally one of the main concerns of Allied planners, never reached a crisis stage. Beginning on 28 January, six LSTs left Naples daily for Anzio, each carrying 1,500 tons of cargo distributed among fifty combat-loaded trucks. Driving off the ships at Anzio, the trucks moved directly to front-line positions with ammunition, fuel, and rations and were replaced on the LSTs by the fifty empty trucks that had made the voyage the previous day. In addition to LSTs, fifteen smaller vessels arrived each week, and every ten days four massive Liberty ships delivered heavier equipment. Between 22 January and 1 June over 531,511 long tons of supplies were unloaded at Anzio, a daily average of 3,920 tons.

On the night of 11–12 May, the Fifth and Eighth Armies launched their long-awaited spring offensive against the Gustav Line. Stymied in attempts to break through at Cassino in February, March, and April, the Allies initially encountered little success in their new drive. Nonetheless, the Germans abandoned Monte Cassino after a week of heavy fighting by Polish forces, and the French Expeditionary Corps and U.S. II Corps succeeded in breaking the Gustav Line by 15 May. The II Corps continued its drive north toward Terracina, which fell on 23–24 May, and raced toward the Anzio beachhead against rapidly crumbling German resistance as enemy troops began withdrawing northeast toward Rome.

On 5 May General Clark gave General Truscott orders for a new Allied offensive code-named BUFFALO. The VI Corps was to break out of the beachhead on the Cisterna front at Cori, at the base of the Lepini Mountains, and at Velletri near the base of the Alban Hills. Once the breakout occurred, the Anzio units were to



Patrol moving through Cisterna. (National Archives)

drive east through the Velletri Gap to Valmontone, cut Highway 6, the main German route of retreat, and trap the bulk of the enemy forces withdrawing north through the Liri valley. The basic operational concept had been dictated to Clark by Alexander, who was acting on Churchill's desire to destroy the entire *Tenth Army* south of Rome at Valmontone. Clark, however, had little faith in the feasibility of the plan. Furthermore, he believed that most of the recognition for Allied gains thus far obtained in Italy had been attributed unjustly to British forces, and he wanted the Fifth Army to have the singular honor of liberating Rome. He therefore informed Truscott that the VI Corps was to be prepared at any moment during the breakout to swing north for a rapid advance on the Italian capital, especially if stiff enemy resistance was encountered on the route to Valmontone or if the British advance up the Liri valley was slower than planned.

The U.S. 1st Armored Division was to make the initial assault out of the beachhead, supported by the 3d Division and 1st Special Service Force. The 45th Division was to move beyond Carano on the left as far as the Campoleone-Cisterna railroad, while the 36th Infantry Division exploited the expected breakthrough.

At 0545, 23 May, a 45-minute Allied artillery barrage opened on the Cisterna front, followed by armor and infantry attacks along the entire line from Carano to the Mussolini Canal. Although resistance was very stiff, by evening the 1st Special Service Force and 1st Armored Division had breached the enemy main line of resistance, while the XII Tactical Air Command completed the last of 722 sorties. The following day VI Corps forces cut Highway 7 above Cisterna and encircled the town, the scene of continued heavy fighting by desperate enemy forces. The town finally fell on 25 May at the cost of 476 Americans killed, 2,321 wounded, and 75 missing.

Earlier on 25 May, at 0730, troops of the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron, 85th Infantry Division, U.S. II Corps, racing north from Terracina across the Pontine Marshes, met soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 36th Engineer Combat Regiment, from the Anzio beachhead, effecting the long-planned and longer-awaited link-up between Fifth Army forces. With the physical juncture of the II and VI Corps, the beachhead ceased to exist and the formerly isolated soldiers became the left flank of the Fifth Army. Clark personally greeted the II Corps troops three hours later.

Meanwhile, the breakout west was proving costly to the VI Corps. The 1st Armored Division lost 100 armored vehicles in the first day alone, while the entire corps took over 4,000 casualties in the first five days of the offensive. Allied troops, however, counted 4,838 enemy prisoners, including 1,000 in Cisterna, and destroyed or damaged 2,700 enemy vehicles.

On the same day that the Fifth Army front merged with the Anzio beachhead, General Clark also split Truscott's forces into two parts, sending the 3d Division, the 1st Special Service Force, and elements of the 1st Armored Division toward Valmontone. This thrust, however, proved insufficient, and most of the *Tenth Army* escaped north to fight again. In the meantime the 45th and 34th Infantry Divisions, along with the rest of the Fifth Army, joined in the hot pursuit of German forces falling back on Rome, a scarce thirty miles distant. Americans liberated the Italian capital on 4 June 1944.

Analysis

During the four months of the Anzio Campaign the Allied VI Corps suffered over 29,200 combat casualties (4,400 killed, 18,000 wounded, 6,800 prisoners or missing) and 37,000 noncombat casualties. Two-thirds of these losses, amounting to 17 percent of VI Corps'



“Anzio Harbor Under German Bombardment” by Edward A. Reep.
(Army Art Collection)

effective strength, were inflicted between the initial landings and the end of the German counteroffensive on 4 March. Of the combat casualties, 16,200 were Americans (2,800 killed, 11,000 wounded, 2,400 prisoners or missing) as were 26,000 of the Allied noncombat casualties. German combat losses, suffered wholly by the *Fourteenth Army*, were estimated at 27,500 (5,500 killed, 17,500 wounded, and 4,500 prisoners or missing)—figures very similar to Allied losses.

The Anzio Campaign continues to be controversial, just as it was during its planning and implementation stages. The operation clearly failed in its immediate objectives of outflanking the Gustav Line, restoring mobility to the Italian campaign, and speeding the capture of Rome. Allied forces were quickly pinned down and contained within a small beachhead, and they were effectively rendered incapable of conducting any sort of major offensive action for four months pending the advance of Fifth Army forces to the south. Anzio failed to be the panacea the Allies sought. As General Lucas repeatedly stated before the landing, which he always considered a gamble, the paltry allotments of men and supplies were not commensurate with the high goals sought by British planners. He steadfastly maintained that under the circumstances the small Anzio

force accomplished all that could have been realistically expected. Lucas' critics charge, however, that a more aggressive and imaginative commander, such as a Patton or Truscott, could have obtained the desired goals by an immediate, bold offensive from the beachhead. Lucas was overly cautious, spent valuable time digging in, and allowed the Germans to prepare countermeasures to ensure that an operation conceived as a daring Allied offensive behind enemy lines became a long, costly campaign of attrition.

Yet the campaign did accomplish several goals. The presence of a significant Allied force behind the German main line of resistance, uncomfortably close to Rome, represented a constant threat. The Germans could not ignore Anzio and were forced into a response, thereby surrendering the initiative in Italy to the Allies. The 135,000 troops of the *Fourteenth Army* surrounding Anzio could not be moved elsewhere, nor could they be used to make the already formidable Gustav Line virtually impregnable. The Anzio beachhead thus guaranteed that the already steady drain of scarce German troop reserves, equipment, and materiel would continue unabated, ultimately enabling the 15th Army Group to break through in the south. But the success was costly.



ANZIO 1944

Further Readings

For additional reading see William L. Allen, *Anzio: Edge of Disaster* (1978); Fred Sheehan, *Anzio: Epic of Bravery* (1964); and Martin Blumenson, *Anzio: The Gamble That Failed* (1963). For a British perspective, see Wynford Vaughan-Thomas, *Anzio* (1961). The official U.S. Army histories, which include Martin Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino* (1969); Ernest F. Fisher, Jr., *Cassino to the Alps* (1977); and the War Department Historical Division, *Anzio Beachhead, 22 January–25 May 1944* (1948), remain the most comprehensive histories available on the overall operational and tactical aspects of the Anzio Campaign.

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Cover: *Men come ashore from LCIs at Anzio on D-day.*
(National Archives)