

CHAPTER XI * * * * *

The Cassino - Anzio Operation

A. *GAINS OF THE CASSINO-ANZIO CAMPAIGN*

THE Cassino-Anzio campaign, 16 January-31 March, failed in its major objective, the linking of the beachhead with the southern front. Initial success by the British 10 Corps in its attack across the Garigliano created a serious threat to the Gustav Line by 19 January; however, the enemy moved reserves swiftly and stopped our advance by strong counterattacks at critical points. By disrupting the attempt of the 46 Division to cross the upper Garigliano on 19-20 January the Germans continued to hold the south flank of the Liri Valley. They were therefore well prepared to meet the assault of the 36th Division across the Rapido River on 20-22 January.

Fifth Army gained complete tactical surprise in its landing at Anzio on 22 January. Before the enemy could rush reinforcements to the Colli Laziali area VI Corps had penetrated an average distance of ten miles from Anzio and threatened the German lines of communication south of Rome. Kesselring met this new danger by bringing in troops from northern Italy, and on 3 February the German Fourteenth Army began a series of counterattacks which recovered important ground. Thereafter VI Corps was forced to assume the defensive, and March ended with the opposing forces at the beachhead locked in stalemate.

On the southern front Fifth Army continued its efforts to smash through the Gustav Line, held by the German Tenth Army. Failing in its first attempt to cross the Rapido north of Cassino, the 34th Division forced a break in the German defenses by 31 January. The FEC paralleled this advance and secured the Belvedere bridgehead to protect the II Corps right flank in its envelopment of Cassino. By 12 February II Corps had failed to capture the town, and the New Zealand Corps took over the battle. This Corps, composed of three divisions withdrawn from Eighth Army, made two drives on Cassino. The attack that opened on 15 February by bombing the Abbey yielded no gains of consequence.

The co-ordinated air, artillery, and infantry operation of 15-22 March very nearly succeeded in taking the Cassino fortress. But again the enemy held, and at the end of March the German line was essentially the same as on 12 February. The period ended with Allied armies regrouping for the offensive that was to open in May. One corps, directly under the command of Allied Armies in Italy, took over the Adriatic sector. Eighth Army moved south to cover the Cassino-Rapido front, while Fifth Army concentrated south of the Liri-Garigliano junction and held on at Anzio.

Gains of the Cassino-Anzio campaign were small compared with the heavy casualties suffered by Fifth Army. At each end of the Gustav Line the Germans had been forced to give ground that was to prove invaluable in the May offensive. (See *Map No. 18.*) At Anzio VI Corps held positions on the flank of the enemy, which were a constant threat to German communications. These territorial gains, very insignificant in area, possessed considerable strategic importance. In terms of the strategy of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Fifth Army achieved a large measure of success in holding many enemy divisions in the Italian theater. The troops so engaged were thus prevented from employment on either the Russian front or the impending second front in France. Serious German losses in personnel and supplies were to aid the Allies materially in this war of attrition.

During the 129 days from D Day at Salerno to the end of the Winter Line campaign, 15 January 1944, Fifth Army suffered 37,773 battle casualties. The Cassino-Anzio campaign 16 January-31 March produced 52,130 casualties in 76 days ⁽¹⁾. British losses were 22,092 as against 22,219 American casualties; the FEC had 7,421 casualties. These figures indicate the severity of the fighting. Only rough estimates can be made of German losses. Fifth Army captured 8,557 prisoners, making a total of 14,108 since 9 September 1943. Enemy casualties in killed and wounded were known to be high, with positive evidence that several battalions were practically annihilated. It is unlikely, however, that enemy losses were as high as our own.

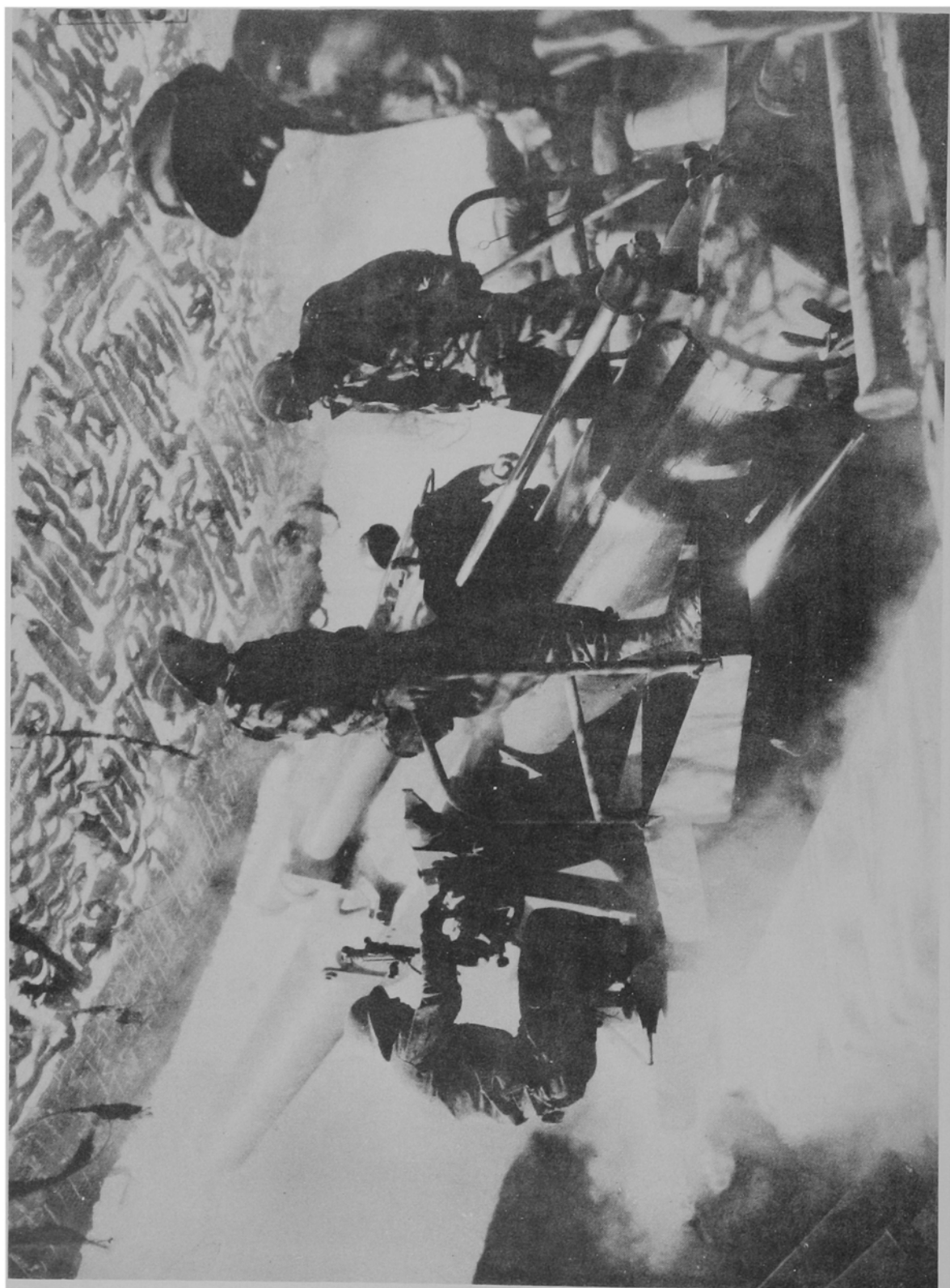
B. THE ACTION OF SUPPORTING ARMS

Allied air retained complete mastery over the Luftwaffe. Our planes roamed at will over the front lines and the enemy's rear areas, bombing and strafing strongpoints, gun positions, communications, troop concentrations, and motor

⁽¹⁾ Casualties of Eighth Army units attached to Fifth Army are not included in this figure.

A Long Tom of the 36th Field Artillery fires a mission at night on the Cassino front.





Fifth Army artillery was greatly strengthened by the arrival of the 240-mm howitzers.

transport. Bad weather in January and February interfered seriously with the air program and in part explains our inability to prevent the enemy build-up at Anzio. The necessity of supporting two fronts imposed added burdens on the air force. The major effort during the campaign was made in support of VI Corps at Anzio, with the notable exceptions of 15 February and 15 March, when very heavy air attacks preceded the New Zealand Corps assaults against Cassino. The attack on the Abbey of Montecassino on 15 February was reported as the largest ever made on a point target, with 255 medium and heavy bombers dropping 576 tons. On 17 February another record for the Italian campaign was made when 533 light, medium, and heavy bombers dropped about 1100 tons in close support of VI Corps at Anzio.

Heavy artillery of Fifth Army was increased by the arrival of two battalions of 240-mm howitzers in January and by the conversion of two battalions of 155-mm M1 howitzers to 8-inch howitzers. These heavy pieces with their pin-point accuracy were very effective in both close support and long-range destructive fires. Eight-inch howitzers were especially successful in pulverizing the stone houses of Cassino, against which 105-mm howitzer shells were relatively ineffective. The 90-mm antiaircraft gun, employed against ground targets, proved superior to the enemy's famous 88-mm gun. Fifth Army artillery ammunition expenditure reached almost astronomical proportions. (*See Annex No. 3D.*) The artillery was on the whole more effective at the beachhead than against the strongly constructed fortifications of the Gustav Line. These defensive works withstood some of the heaviest concentrations ever fired on a small area.

The chemical mortar battalions were invaluable in thickening artillery fires and in giving close-in support for the infantry. The 4.2-inch mortars averaged about 1700 rounds of white phosphorus and high explosive per day 22 January-31 March. Smoke screens were used more extensively than at any other period in the Italian campaign. At Anzio the generating companies laid screens on call in addition to the nightly harbor screen. During the period 4-18 February 40,000 gallons of fog oil, 6,000 gallons of fuel oil, and several thousand smoke pots and floats were used in area screens. On the southern front 10,000 smoke pots were used to screen the Rapido Valley during 22-26 January. In the Garigliano sector screens were produced constantly over bridges. The 88th Division, for example, used 12,955 smoke pots during 6-17 March.

Mountainous terrain on the southern front presented difficulties in supply and evacuation which were similar to those of the Winter Line campaign. The limited road net north of Cassino, inclement weather, and enemy artillery and mortar fire on trails and roads continued to hamper forward troops. At one time in February four divisions were being supplied over the bridge installed

near the barracks. East of the Rapido numerous one-way roads were utilized intensively and taxed engineer facilities to the utmost. Large quantities of supplies were carried by pack mules from dumps two to three miles east of the river to supply troops in the hills northwest of Cassino. Italian pack mule groups rendered outstanding service in supplying the 34th Division. East of Sant'Angelo and on the Garigliano sector the supply problem presented fewer difficulties, although traffic was necessarily congested in both areas. Evacuation in forward areas on the Cassino front was especially difficult because of the high casualty rate and the rugged terrain. The 34th Division alone evacuated 3851 casualties in February, of which 1535 were non-battle casualties.

C. *EIGHTH ARMY ACTIVITIES*

Except for local attacks against limited objectives, Eighth Army was unable to advance much beyond the line held on 15 January. The 1 Canadian Division attacked on 30 January in the coastal sector along the Tollo-Chieti road. Only slight gains were made against stiff resistance. There was little activity beyond the usual patrol clashes on the rest of the front. General Alexander's decision to reinforce Fifth Army with the New Zealand Corps made it necessary for Eighth Army to assume a defensive role. The temporary loss of four divisions to Fifth Army was partly remedied by the acquisition of 2 Polish Corps, composed of the 3 Carpathian and 5 Kresowa Divisions, which began to take over the south sector on 4 February. This period of comparative inactivity left Eighth Army in good condition for the drive against Cassino and Sant'Angelo in the May offensive.

