

Although this sector proved to be the weakest part of the Gustav Line, our troops suffered heavy casualties before they finally broke through the outer defenses after eight days of combat.

3. *The 34th Division Crosses the Rapido.* General Ryder, commanding the 34th Division, issued his orders on 21 January for the attack into the mountains northwest of Cassino. Reinforced by the 756th Tank Battalion, the 937th Field Artillery Battalion, and Company D, 2d Chemical Battalion, the division was to make the main effort on the right. Here the 133d Infantry under Col. Carley L. Marshall was to capture Hills 56 and 213, the barracks area, and the road to Cassino south of the barracks. The 135th Infantry under Col. Robert W. Ward was to maintain direct pressure on Cassino and be prepared to attack Cassino from the north. The 168th Infantry under Col. Mark M. Boatner was to occupy an assembly area one mile east of the barracks during the night of 24-25 January, prepare to pass through the 133d Infantry, and go on to capture the division objectives—Mount Castellone, Sant'Angelo Hill, and Albaneta Farm. In the II Corps operations instruction issued on 23 January the division was also directed to cut Highway 6 and prepare to capture Piedimonte or to advance south to assist a prospective attack by the 36th Division. The latter was to demonstrate by fire and movement to simulate a renewal of the bridgehead operation at its former crossing sites and prepare to force the Rapido north of Sant'Angelo with one regimental combat team to establish a bridgehead for the passage of armor. Corps artillery was in support of the 34th Division.

The attack order of the 133d Infantry, issued on 23 January, called for the 1st Battalion (less one company in reserve) to attack in the north part of the regimental zone and seize the area of Hill 213. In the center the 3d Battalion was to take Hill 445 just south of Majola Hill, while the 100th Battalion (substituting as the 2d Battalion) gained the road south of the Italian military barracks. The 151st Field Artillery Battalion and Company D, 2d Chemical Battalion, were in direct support. The 756th Tank Battalion, which had 54 medium and 17 light tanks available on D Day, 24 January, was to provide additional weight to the 133d Infantry attack. All four of the division field artillery battalions plus a battalion of 155-mm howitzers from Corps artillery (937th) were to fire a 30-minute preparation, aided by the three cannon companies and the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

All three battalions of the 133d Infantry moved forward from the assembly area while the artillery laid down its heavy concentrations. At 2150, 24 January, 10 minutes before the jump off from the line of departure, 6 colored flares went up from the enemy's lines. As in the case of the 36th Division attack on Sant'Angelo, surprise could not be expected. Except for the 100th Battalion,

which was 30 minutes late in crossing the line of departure, the assault troops attacked on schedule. None of the battalions made much progress during the night. The 1st Battalion was held up by a minefield 200 yards west of the line of departure; the 3d Battalion managed to get a few men up to the river but could not force a crossing against heavy fire from the barracks; the 100th Battalion on the left reached the river, but at 0325 reported that all companies were still held up on the east side. The 756th Tank Battalion attempted to cross the river to clear lanes through the minefields for the 1st Battalion; but the tanks could not ford the stream.

At about 0430, 25 January, General Ryder ordered Colonel Marshall to have the 100th Battalion cross and fan out to the right to take the objective of the 3d Battalion; the latter was to sideslip to the north and take the objective of the 1st Battalion while the latter held in place. This plan, attempted after an artillery barrage at 0900, also failed. Within an hour the 100th Battalion had elements across the river, but was stopped by barbed wire covered by machine guns. On the north flank the 1st Battalion on 25 January succeeded in clearing a lane through the minefield and had elements west of the Rapido by 1330. Two hours later the 3d Battalion, which had again been ordered to advance on its original objective, established a small bridgehead across the river. Shortly after midnight on 25 January all three battalions had succeeded in their crossing attempt and were reorganizing on the west bank.

General Ryder ordered a modification of the attack plan on 25 January. The 133d Infantry was to resume its attack that night, and at daylight on 26 January the 168th Infantry was to pass through to seize the division objectives. However, since the 133d Infantry made very little progress in its attack, the advance of the 168th Infantry was postponed to the 27th. At 2300, 25 January, the 135th Infantry was to cross the Rapido south of the barracks, turn south along the west bank, and clear the enemy from the east slopes of the high ground. With engineers attached, the 756th Tank Battalion was to construct passages over the Rapido during the night and then give support to the 133d and 135th Infantry.

The action on 26 January resulted in few gains. Every attempt by the 100th Battalion to advance was repulsed by the enemy. The 1st Battalion, 133d Infantry, succeeded in reaching the base of Hill 213 by 0640, but could not consolidate and had to fall back east of the river. The 3d Battalion then came to its assistance, and by 1432 both battalions had again reached the base of Hill 213. At nightfall they were back on the west bank in defensive positions. The 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, crossed the river with one company just north of Cassino at 0330, 26 January, and reached the edge of the town, where

flooded ditches, wire, mines, and machine-gun fire put an end to the advance. The battalion commander recalled the company. An attack launched in conjunction with the 100th Battalion at 1000 against Point 225, midway between Cassino and the barracks, failed. No armor could get over to assist either regiment. Six tanks were stuck on the most likely route and had to wait for extensive engineer work to improve the crossing.

4. *Capture of Hills 56 and 213.* The 133d Infantry, after suffering more than 300 casualties, had a small bridgehead across the Rapido by nightfall on 26 January and had revealed a weakness in the Gustav Line. General Keyes, in an operation instruction of 26 January, directed the 34th Division to continue the attack to capture Hill 213; by division order the assault was to begin at 0700, 27 January, after an hour's artillery preparation. The 168th Infantry would pass through the 133d Infantry and make the main effort assisted by the 756th Tank Battalion, which would precede the infantry to break down wire, overrun antipersonnel mines, and destroy enemy strongpoints <sup>(1)</sup>. The artillery preparation was finally scheduled for 0630-0730. During the last 10 minutes a company of tanks was to fire 1000 rounds of delayed 75-mm ammunition at the stone wall just north of the barracks. At 0730 the 1st and 3d Battalions, 168th Infantry, each preceded by a platoon of tanks, were to advance behind a rolling barrage from the Rapido River as the line of departure. Success or failure in getting tanks across the Rapido would have a great bearing on the entire operation. With roads narrow and deep in mud, herculean efforts would be required to enable the 756th Tank Battalion to execute its mission. Company B was to lead the attack, supported by fire from Company C, which would follow. Company A would support by fire on targets along the base of Hill 56. After crossing with the aid of the engineers the tanks were to assemble north of Hill 56 prepared to exploit north into Cairo village and south toward Cassino.

Divisional artillery fired 5460 rounds in the preparation and rolling barrage preceding the attack. At 0730 the tanks started along the trail to the Rapido which leaves the Sant'Elia road about a mile north of Mount Villa hamlet. Some of the tanks slipped off the edge of the narrow, flooded route, but before 0830 two had crossed successfully. Two more of Company B's tanks were over by 0915, but tanks of Company C stuck in the mud and blocked the route. Engineers then began to construct a corduroy route just south of the trail, while the work of clearing the tanks went on. Of the four tanks west of the river all were out of action by 1300. Two were destroyed by enemy rocket grenades,

---

<sup>(1)</sup> Companies A and D, 2d Chemical Battalion; the 34th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop; and the 1st Platoon of Company C, 109th Engineer Battalion, were attached.

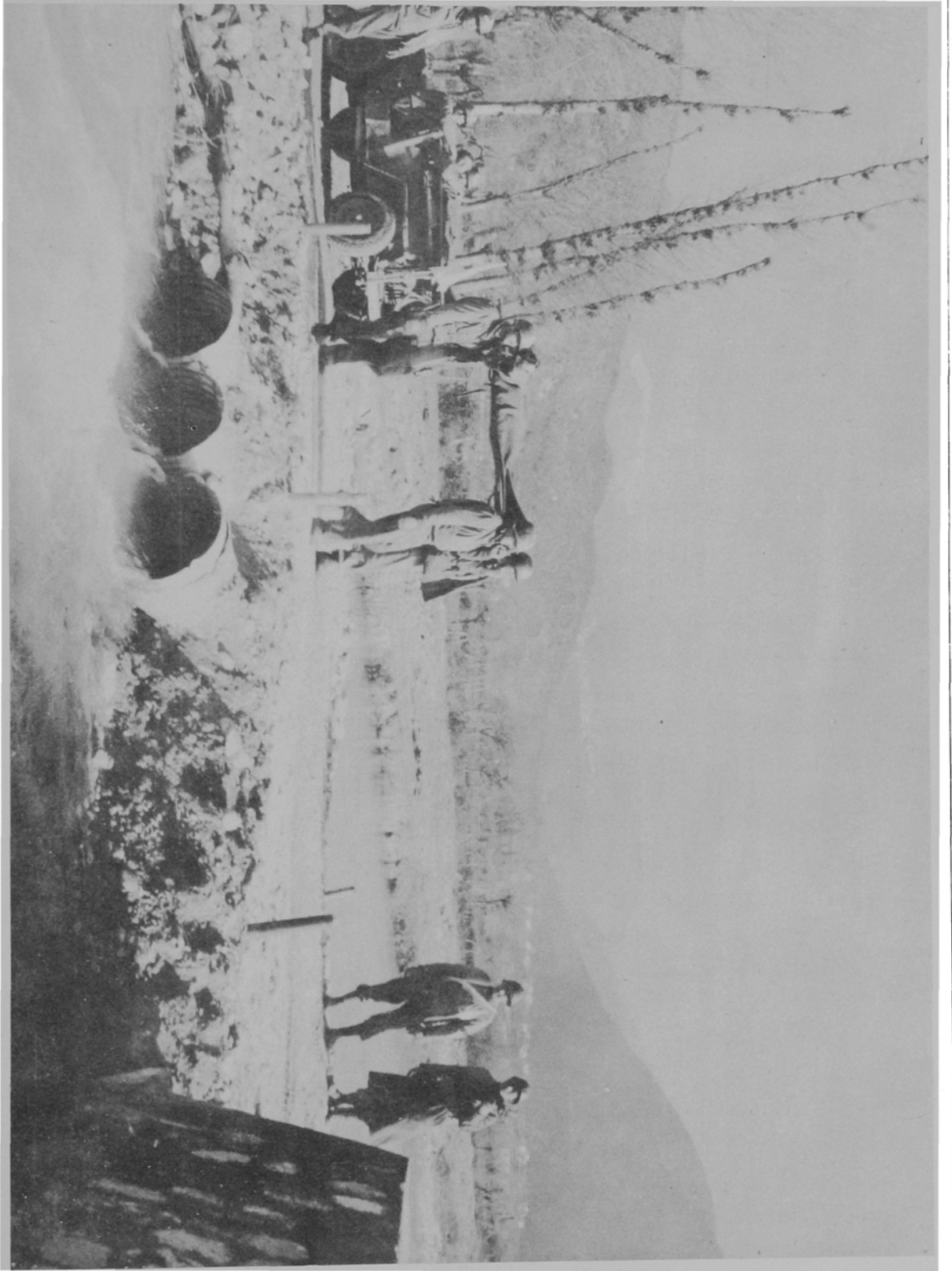
one suffered a broken track when it lit a mine, and the fourth stuck near the crossing when it returned for more ammunition. Yet the tanks had succeeded in clearing lanes for the infantry.

Meanwhile the 168th Infantry crossed on the tank route with the 1st Battalion on the left and the 3d Battalion on the right. Throughout the day the four companies west of the Rapido were subjected to heavy enemy fire. By nightfall the leading elements were near the base of Hills 56 and 213 after suffering heavy casualties. Company C crossed after dark, passed through Companies A and B at 2100, and before dawn on 28 January had a few men on Hill 213. The company commander believed that the position could not be held during daylight so he moved the company back across the river. Companies A and B also started back when this withdrawal was observed. The battalion commander stopped the troops at the east bank and organized defensive positions. The 3d Battalion held on west of the river until dark of the 27th. Then Companies I and K withdrew, turned north along the river, and crossed 500 yards upstream from the tank route. A French guide led the troops through the minefields, and by dawn on 28 January two platoons were dug in midway between Cairo village and the Rapido. The infantry held in position during the day while the engineers worked on tank routes.

A combat team was formed to renew the attack on 29 January. One company and one platoon of the 760th Tank Battalion were added with the 175th Field Artillery Battalion in direct support. All of the Corps engineers (235th Engineer Battalion and 1108th Engineer Group) were in support. The 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, was to make the main effort toward the saddle between Hills 56 and 213. One company of tanks was to precede the infantry. On the left the 1st Battalion and a platoon of tanks were to take Hill 56, while the 3d Battalion with another platoon of tanks would advance to the north of Hill 213.

This plan succeeded. The engineers had found an alternate tank route along the Corps boundary and had two other routes ready. However, by 0700, 29 January, only seven tanks were across. Two burned out when hit by self-propelled guns; two more ran out of ammunition. Company E, spearheading the infantry assault, made good progress in the morning but had to wait for tanks to destroy the strongpoints. The 756th Tank Battalion played a decisive role in forcing the issue when 23 tanks, coming down the dry river bed from the Corps boundary, turned west at about 1600. The infantry struck swiftly. By 1845 all three battalions were at the base of Hills 56 and 213. The 2d and 3d Battalions captured Hill 213 before dawn on 30 January, and the 1st Battalion took Hill 56. Many of the enemy were trapped in dugouts and pillboxes, and mopping up continued until noon. The hills were then consolidated sufficiently

*Wounded men of the 142d Infantry, from the Castellone battlefield, cross the Rapido Valley.*





*French anti-aircraft artillery guarding the FEC supply route to the Beivedere sector.*

to enable the 168th Infantry to repel strong counterattacks in the afternoon and on 31 January. By 1130 a platoon of Company K, aided by a platoon of tanks, captured Cairo village and with it the headquarters of the 131st Grenadier Regiment. This success enabled the French on the north, held up for two days before Marino Hill, to take that point. The capture of Hills 56 and 213 and Cairo village netted 147 prisoners.

5. *The Belvedere Bridgehead.* While the 34th Division had been establishing its bridgehead across the Rapido, the FEC had been driving at the high ground between Terelle and the Rapido River to secure the north flank of the intended envelopment of Cassino. General Juin completed the necessary reorganization on 24 January. At dawn on the next day the 3d Algerian Division began the assault on Le Propaia, by-passing the enemy's strong positions on Mount Cifalco. The Germans, surprised by this maneuver, lost Le Propaia to the 4th Tunisian Infantry (4<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Tunisiens), which went on to cross Secco Creek and reach the foot of Belvedere Hill by early afternoon. Although an enemy counterattack recovered part of Le Propaia on 25 January, the 4th Tunisian Infantry captured Belvedere Hill and Abate Hill on 26 January while the 3d Algerian Infantry (3<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens) threw back the enemy on Le Propaia. This audacious assault, executed boldly, again took the enemy by surprise. The Germans counterattacked fiercely on 27 January and succeeded in recapturing Abate Hill and Hill 700 to the southeast; but the French held firmly on Belvedere Hill.

The French, having by-passed Mount Cifalco, had partly uncovered their right and had provided the enemy with an opportunity to drive southeast against this weakened flank. General Clark ordered that an American unit be assigned the mission of exploiting the Belvedere bridgehead to the south and southwest. II Corps thereupon attached the 142d Regimental Combat Team to the 34th Division as a special task force under Brig. Gen. Frederick B. Butler for combined operations with the French. Col. George E. Lynch, commanding the 142d Infantry, received orders for the move at 1415, 26 January. The regiment was to assemble near Sant'Elia, cross the Rapido, ascend the slopes of Belvedere Hill, and then turn south to capture Mount Castellone. Detailed plans for the attack were made by French and American officers at the command post of Maj. Gen. de Goislard de Monsabert, commanding the 3d Algerian Division. The 142d Infantry was to jump off from Belvedere Hill on the morning of 28 January. The main effort of the French was to be north of the Terelle road toward Abate Hill, while the 142d Infantry struck for Manna Farm south of the road. To meet this schedule the 142d Infantry had to make a long move by truck and foot, the last part of which lay through an area southeast of Bel-

vedere Hill which had not yet been cleared of enemy pockets. The 3d Battalion, 142d Infantry, reached Sant'Elia at about dark 27 January. There French guides led the way across the Sant'Elia valley; but halfway across the guides left the battalion to its own devices, declaring that they had never been beyond that point. The 3d Battalion went on, but enemy machine-gun fire killed the commander and wounded the executive officer. The troops returned to Sant'Elia to reorganize.

General de Monsabert, desiring not to sacrifice the gains made by fierce fighting in the preceding three days, planned to renew his assault at 1100, 28 January. In the early hours of the morning the enemy launched counterattacks from the northwest with artillery support. The French repulsed two attacks and broke up a third with well directed artillery fire. At 1000 the enemy attempted to infiltrate along the valley between Belvedere Hill and Le Propaia, but was again driven back. However, the French could not resume their attack until the Belvedere bridgehead was more secure and so postponed offensive operations until 29 January.

Early in the morning of the 29th the 2d Battalion, 142d Infantry, arrived at Hill 382 on the lower slopes of Belvedere Hill. The 1st Battalion followed that night, and the 3d Battalion came up on 30-31 January. On the night of 29-30 January the 2d Battalion moved to the left of Hill 700 and on the next day attacked toward Manna Farm. The French at the same time attacked Hill 720 on Belvedere Hill, assisted by Company C, 142d Infantry. The 2d Battalion reached a point just northeast of Manna Farm by nightfall on 30 January and captured the objective on 31 January. Company C in the meantime mopped up opposition half a mile to the west of Hill 720. Since the 3d Algerian Division succeeded in retaking Abate Hill, the Belvedere bridgehead was relatively secure.

6. *Artillery and Air Support.* The artillery of II Corps supported the 34th Division and French attacks with very heavy fire. During the period 24-31 January 164,203 rounds were consumed, as follows:

<i>Weapon</i>	<i>Average number in action daily</i>	<i>Total rounds</i>	<i>Rounds per gun per day</i>
75-mm howitzer . . . . .	8.5	5,559	81.8
3-inch gun . . . . .	127.5	38,579	37.8
105-mm howitzer. . . . .	129.1	75,729	73.3
4.5-inch gun . . . . .	12.0	4,894	51.0
155-mm howitzer 1917-18 . . . . .	24.0	10,418	54.3
155-mm howitzer M1 . . . . .	47.3	13,464	35.6
155-mm gun . . . . .	26.9	6,990	32.5
8-inch howitzer . . . . .	23.4	8,518	45.5
240-mm howitzer . . . . .	2.0	52	13.0

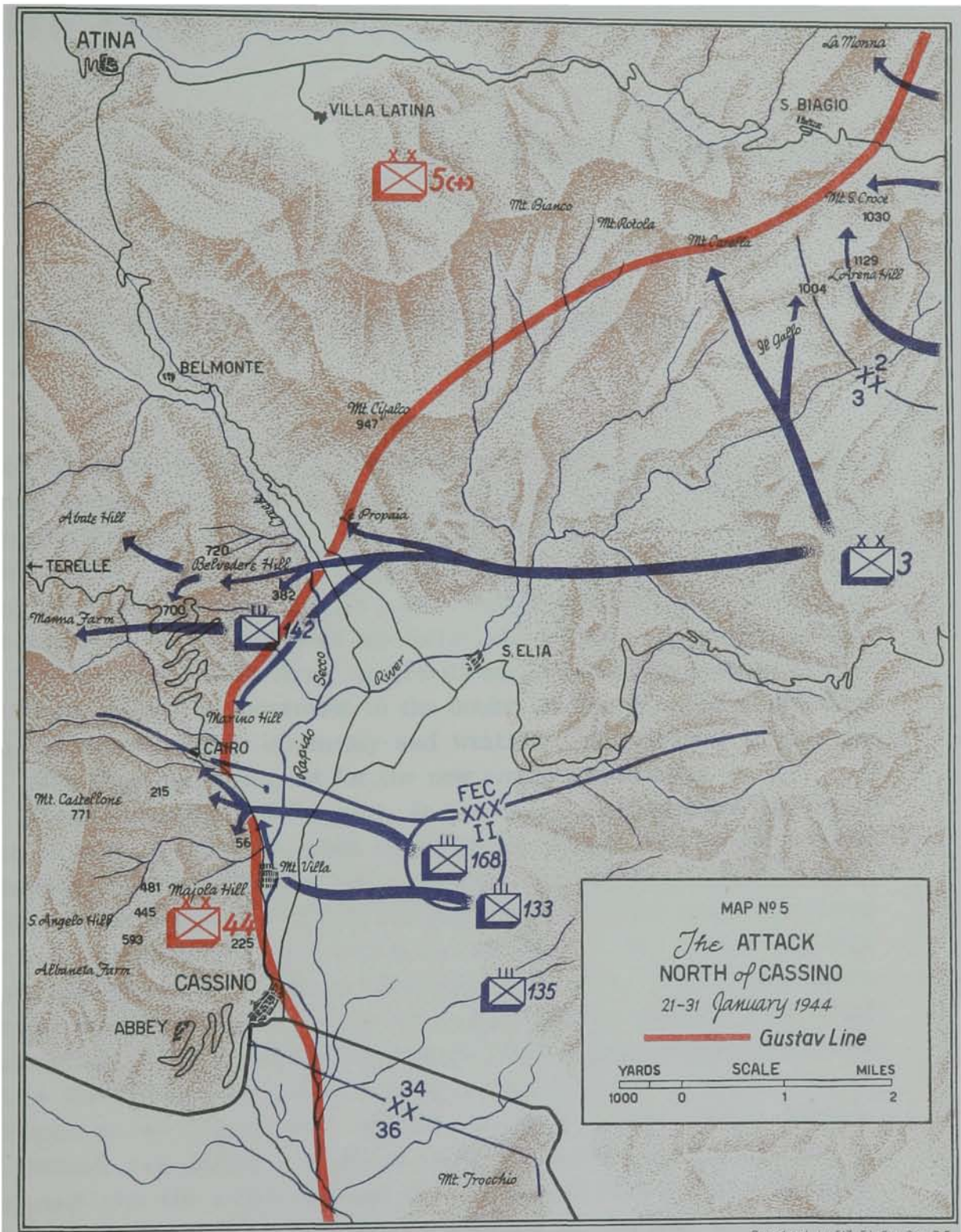


Most of this ammunition was expended in support of the attack north of Cassino, although some of it hit enemy installations in the Liri Valley. Two 240-mm howitzers made their first appearance on the Italian front on 30 January and proved to be very accurate weapons for long-range destructive firing.

Only minor air support was provided since the Anzio beachhead required nearly the full efforts of XII Air Support Command, and bad weather curtailed operations. On 26 January eight A-36 and eight P-40 sorties were flown to bomb Belmonte and the road south of Atina. On 27 January 40 P-40's bombed the same areas, 60 A-20's bombed Terelle, and 8 P-40's bombed Atina. Again on 28 January 24 P-40's bombed Terelle, and 5 P-40's hit Belmonte. An enemy counterattack forming north of Abate Hill was broken up by 12 A-36's.

### C. SUMMARY OF THE RAPIDO OPERATION

The efforts of II Corps to force the Rapido River in the period 20-31 January were made in accordance with the 15th Army Group directive to maintain maximum pressure against the Gustav Line. Viewed in terms of terrain, troops available, and the nature of the enemy's defenses, these efforts achieved significant success. The 36th Division suffered a serious defeat after heroic action in one of the most difficult of all military operations—a frontal assault against a strongly defended river line where practically every factor favored the enemy. The 34th Division, after failing in its initial efforts, succeeded in making a slight but important breach in the Gustav Line north of Cassino. In this area our troops not only forced a defended river line but also captured the first foothills of the high ground immediately behind that barrier. At the same time the FEC, with only two divisions to hold a long front, further extended its positions, bypassed a key strongpoint of the Gustav Line, and consolidated a bridgehead in the mountains adjoining the II Corps zone. The combined success of French and American troops thus made it possible for II Corps to continue its attack south toward Cassino. Although Fifth Army was not on its way up the Liri Valley when Operation Shingle was launched, the attack on the southern front had succeeded in drawing a part of the available enemy reserves into the line. The enemy's decision to commit these reserves shows that he completely failed to appreciate the imminence of a landing far in the rear of the Gustav Line.



Reproduced by 317. Ed. Svy. Gov. R. F.