THE NECESSITY FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ABBEY OF MONTE CASSINO

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ABSTRACT

THE NECESSITY FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ABBEY OF MONTE CASSINO, by MAJ John G. Clement, 84 pages.

The Abbey of Monte Cassino, founded by Saint Benedict in A.D. 529, at the beginning of the Italian campaign was one of only two sites requiring special consideration in the interest of historical preservation. The monastery overlooked the only north-south road from Naples to Rome. The promontory, studied by the Italian War College as an example of a position made impregnable by nature, was the focal point of the German Gustav Line. The German defensive scheme did not include the monastery but did establish positions within 300 meters of its outer walls. After the lackluster landing at Anzio, the Fifth Army was obligated to conduct a winter campaign to break through the Gustav Line and relieve Anzio. In a sinister scape of bush and rock, soldiers endured immeasurable hardships while the monastery stood immune to the scars of war. On 15 February 1944, 253 tons of explosives were dropped on the Abbey of Monte Cassino as hundreds of refugees and wounded assembled in the chapel for morning services. The German paratroopers survived the onslaught of Allied airpower without a casualty and occupied the ruins that would serve as a strongpoint for the next four months. The perceived necessity for the bombing was nested in leadership interpretation of military necessity, psychological impact, and political considerations. Because the bombing was not coordinated with the ground assault, it was tactically irrelevant and failed to meet the requirements of military necessity. Decisions made to bolster friendly morale and to avoid political conflict are not intended for the defeat of the enemy and also fail to meet the requirements of necessity. The bombing was a careless act resulting in the needless death of civilians, destruction of a sacred building, and a waste of valuable military resources.

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CHAPTER 1

THE ABBEY OF MONTE CASSINO

Early in the sixth century, Saint Benedict traveled south from Rome looking for a refuge from the vice, violence, and corruption of the crumbling Roman Empire. He ultimately settled at Monte Cassino, an isolated peak eighty miles south of Rome (figure 1). The peak rose 1,600 feet above the ancient town of Casinum and provided observation in all directions. The only access to the top of Monte Cassino was along a five-mile-long hairpin track. The natural defensive nature of the location appealed to Saint Benedict, who had to be concerned with successive inroads of barbarians.[1]

Fig. 1. Abbey of Monte Cassino. *Source*: "The Battle of Monte Cassino," Elite Forces of the Third Reich, Available from http://www.forces70.freeserve.co.uk/fallshirmjager/cassino.htm, Internet, Accessed 21 January 2002.

Saint Benedict demolished the ancient temple of Apollo that stood on the site and began construction of his monastery. The monastery incorporated an existing Roman fortified tower into its walls that would ultimately rise four stories and be ten-feet thick at the base. A part of this tower is the only existing fragment of the original building that still stands today.[2]

The disciples of Benedict submitted to the monastic lifestyle of work and prayer based on the Benedictine Rule. Unlike some orders that promoted meditative seclusion, the Benedictines reached into communities. The Benedictines worked as missionaries, founded educational forums, and established hospitals. The monastery became the focus of the monastic movement and one of the spiritual centers of the West.[3]

Through the centuries, the Abbey of Monte Cassino did experience some hardships. The monastery was damaged or destroyed on several occasions prior to World War II. In the year A.D. 569, the monastery fell victim to the invading Lombards. The monks did manage to escape with the original text of the "Benedictine Rule," but the monastery remained in ruins until A.D. 717 when Pope Gregory II ordered its reconstruction. The Saracens set the monastery ablaze in A.D. 883, the Normans plundered the monastery in A.D. 1030, and an earthquake destroyed all but a few outer walls in A.D. 1349. Each time the monastery was rebuilt.

The Benedictines took pride in the beauty of the monastery. Each time it was rebuilt, measures were taken to enhance its appeal. Several generations of artists contributed to the mosaics, frescoes, stucco, and architecture. A school of painting was also founded at the monastery. At the start of World War II, the monastery was revered throughout the world as a place of holiness, culture, and art.

The Italian Campaign

The reality of war stood in stark contrast to ideals and beauty of the Abbey of Monte Cassino. The Italian campaign of World War II presented the Allies with a difficult task. Italy with its succession of jagged peaks stood in stark defiance to anyone foolish enough to really consider it the "soft underbelly of Europe." With the signing of the Italian armistice in September of 1943, German forces cut off supplies to their former Axis partner and started preparing their own defenses on the peninsula. Prior to November 1943, the defense of Italy was split between Field Marshal Erwin Rommel in the north and Field Marshal Albert Kesselring in the south. Hitler unified the command for the defense of Italy under Kesselring when Hitler appointed Kesselring Commander-in-Chief Army Group C in November 1943.[4] Originally, the Germans were planning to defend north of Rome under a plan penned by Rommel. Hitler altered his strategy upon the recommendation of Kesselring.

The Kesselring plan called for three parallel defense lines slanting across the Italian peninsula. The southernmost line was the Reinhard Line, also known as the Winter Line. The Reinhard Line was a chain of light field works. The central line was the Gustav Line. The Gustav Line was an extensive series of defensive positions running along the Rapido and the Garigliano Rivers. The fortified positions occupied the valley bottom behind the rivers and along ridge positions in the mountains. The northernmost line was the Hitler Line, later to be known as the Senger Line. The Hitler Line, which ran from Terracina to the northern wing of the Gustav Line in the Abruzzi Mountains, was fortified with intermittent concrete shelters and tank traps.[5]

The focal point of the entire Gustav Line was the promontory of Monte Cassino. Monte Cassino stood guard above the Via Casilina, the only north-south road from Naples to Rome (figure 2). The Via Casilina, also known as Route 6, crossed the Rapido River near Cassino and ran north through the Liri Valley to Rome. The railroad line from Naples to Rome also ran through the Liri Valley parallel to Route 6. From the Liri Valley, the Gustav Line stretched southwest to the Tyrrhenian Sea at the port of Minturno and northeast up into the Abruzzi Mountains.

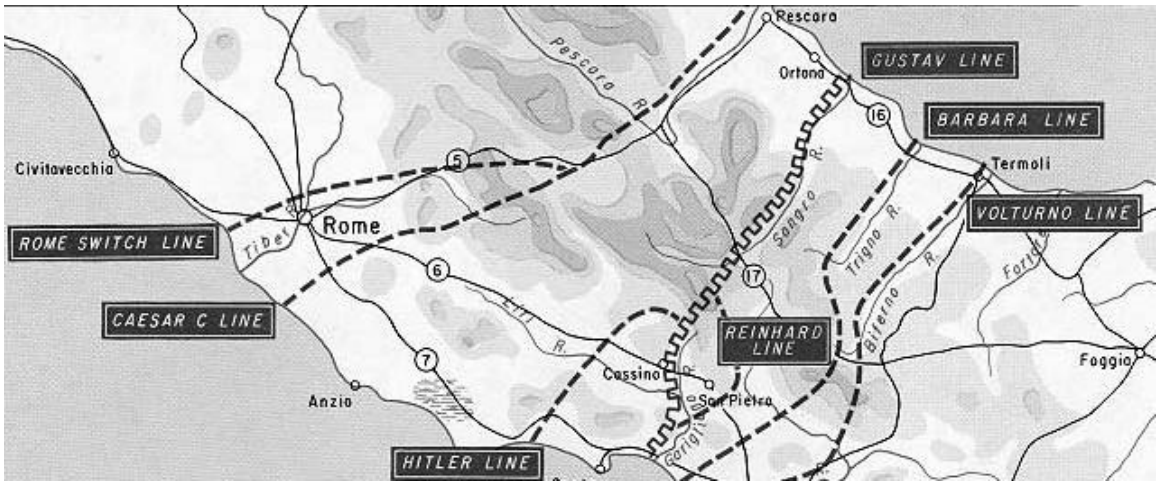

Fig. 2. German Defensive Lines on the Italian Peninsula. *Source*: "World War II – Maps of the European Theater," United States Military Academy Department of History, available from http://www.dean.usma.edu/history/dhistorymaps/WWIIPages /WWIIEurope/ww2es47.htm, Internet, accessed 11 January 2002.

The promontory of Monte Cassino was easily identifiable to forces in the area in late 1943 because of the fortress appearance of the huge monastery. The monastery was recognized by both sides as one of the most-sacred Christian sites in existence. At the beginning of the Italian campaign the Abbey of Monte Cassino was one of only two sites in Italy identified by the Allies as requiring special consideration in the interest of

historical and cultural preservation.[6] Kesselring made the practical decision to forbid the occupation of the monastery while allowing prepared defenses to be positioned on the extensive Benedictine grounds around the monastery.[7]

The strategic goals of the Italian campaign were confirmed during the Trident Conference. The Allied leaders met in Washington in May 1943 as the campaign of North Africa was coming to a close to discuss their options in the Mediterranean. The Allied leaders agreed to the invasion of Italy for two distinct purposes: (1) to knock Italy out of the war and (2) tie down the maximum number of German forces. The concept for the Italian campaign centered on the seizure of Sicily to facilitate the invasion of Italy, a scant two miles away across the Straits of Messina. While the Sicily operation was conducted by General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery's Eighth Army and Lieutenant General George S. Patton's Seventh Army, the task of planning the invasion of mainland Italy fell to the Fifth Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark. Clark was the former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander for the Mediterranean under Eisenhower before becoming the Fifth Army commander. Eisenhower gave Clark credit as an intelligent, aggressive, hard-working organizer with a flair for public relations.[8] Others thought less of Clark; he was also described as "less than tactful" and "driven by vanity."[9]

The Fifth Army was a multinational force with units at one time or another during the Italian campaign from the United States, Great Britain, France, New Zealand, India, the French North African colonies of Algeria and Morocco, and Poland. With each nationality bringing a distinct set of equipment, customs, doctrine, and language, the challenge of command was obviously eminence.

The Italian invasion was given the operational name Avalanche. Operation Avalanche had the objective of establishing a beachhead on the western coast of Italy with the subsequent objectives of capturing Naples and Rome. The planners of Operation Avalanche agreed that a prerequisite for a landing near Naples was a beachhead on the Calabrian peninsula. Allied forces in Calabria would fix German units that might otherwise be repositioned in reaction to the main assault in the Naples area. Additionally, a landing in Calabria would open the Straits of Messina to shipping, and airfields in Calabria would extend Allied air coverage.[10]

The area selected for the landings near Naples was in the vicinity of Salerno. The twenty-mile stretch of beach south of Salerno provided excellent sea approaches. The defenses were predominately fieldworks, and several exits from the beach to the coastal highway would facilitate shore operations. The port at Salerno and the harbor of Amalfi would be valuable assets in receiving supplies. There were some disadvantages in the Salerno location. Mountains enclosing the Sele plain would limit the depth of the initial beachhead and provide the Germans with excellent observation.

The landings at Salerno on 9 September 1944 caught the Germans by surprise. From the German perspective, the timing of the landings was complicated by the Italian surrender the day before. German forces were disarming Italian units and occupying coastal defenses previously manned by Italian forces. Despite its initial success, the Fifth Army beachhead was on the verge of defeat on 13 September. The Allies did not have the resources to build up the beachhead by sea as fast as the Germans could reinforce by land. The German XIV Panzer Corps counterattacked the beachhead while the two German divisions in Calabria moved north towards Salerno. Fortunately, the availability

of naval gunfire and of air support and the slow but steady approach of Montgomery's Eighth Army left the Germans little choice but to establish a new defensive line north of Salerno.[11]

After Salerno, the 15th Army Group, under the command of British General Sir Harold Alexander, coordinated the movement of the American Fifth Army and British Eighth Army as they moved abreast up the Italian peninsula. Post-Salerno operations were detailed by 15th Army Group in two phases. In the first phase, the Fifth Army objective was Naples on the western coast, and the Eighth Army objective was the airfields around Foggia on the eastern coast. In the second phase, the two armies would advance to a line fifty miles north of Rome.[12] For Clark and Fifth Army, the road to Rome would lead them to Anzio, Monte Cassino, and the Gustav Line.

The amphibious landing at Anzio, code-named Shingle by Fifth Army, was intended to threaten German lines of communication and compel them to weaken defenses in the Cassino area. The thinning of the Gustav Line would allow Allied forces to penetrate the German defenses and capture the Alban hills that control the southern approaches to Rome. With the loss of the Alban hills, the Germans would be forced to displace north to more favorable terrain.

Operation Shingle

Under Operation Shingle, British and American forces would conduct attacks against the Gustav line to fix units and draw German reserves south from the Rome area to facilitate the landing at Anzio. The British X Corps would assault across the Garigliano at St. Ambrogio. On the following night, the American II Corps would cross the Rapido at St. Angelo five miles nearer Cassino. On the third night, the American VI

Corps would land at Anzio.

The costly intensive attacks on the Gariglano and Rapido failed to achieve tactical objectives but did achieve the operational objective of pulling German forces south from Rome.[13] The American 36th Division had a particularly rough time in its attempt to assault across the Rapido River. The Germans were strongly entrenched in the village ruins at the crossing site at St. Angelo. The 36th Division patrols failed to clear all the mines on the near side of the river, and the river was swiftly flowing within its steep, muddy banks.[14] For the 36th Division, it was a long night of smashed boats, newly discovered minefields, lost units, and devastating concentrations of mortar and artillery fire. The 36th Division could not hold the bridgehead on the Rapido and was forced to withdraw. The 36th Division suffered over 1,600 dead and wounded with most of the casualties occurring in the infantry battalions.[15]

The VI Corps landing at Anzio was met with little resistance. Instead of driving inland, VI Corps chose to consolidate the position on the beachhead. German forces reacted to the landing and contained the Allied force. The landing at Anzio failed to achieve its desired effect of turning the Gustav line.

The effect of the Operation Shingle attacks was that German XIV Panzer Corps was reinforced from units throughout the region including northern Italy and the Balkans. The troops committed against both parts of the Fifth Army were greatly increased at the expense of German reserves and occupation forces. The Fifth Army attacks in the Monte Cassino area seemed to have conflicting goals. The Garigliano and Rapido attacks were supposed to attract reserves and yet, at the same time, to break through to link up with the VI Corps landing at Anzio.

The tables were now turned on the landing force at Anzio. Before the Anzio landing, there had been no requirement for a winter campaign. With the VI Corps threatened at Anzio, it became essential that Fifth Army conduct immediate and aggressive offensive operations in the Monte Cassino area to break through the Gustav Line and relieve Anzio.

Alexander sent additional troops to Clark to help achieve the much desired penetration of the Gustav Line. The 2d New Zealand Division, the 4th Indian Division, and later the 78th British Division were brought over to Fifth Army from the Eighth Army sector. The three divisions would be combined to form the New Zealand Corps under the command of veteran officer Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg.

The New Zealand Corps

The New Zealand Corps under the command of Freyberg had an unusual composition. The 2d New Zealand Division was composed of two infantry brigades and one armored brigade. Freyberg had reorganized the division to include an armored brigade because he had been dissatisfied with the armor support that he received during the North African campaign. The 4th Indian Division was manned by an equal number of British, Indian, and Gurkha battalions, all under the command of British officers. Alexander envisaged the use of the New Zealand Corps as a mobile force that could exploit a breach in the Gustav Line.

The original mission of the New Zealand Corps was changed from exploitation force. The New Zealand Corps was given the mission of relieving II Corps, finishing the capture of Monte Cassino, and breaking into the Liri Valley. The American 34th Division had experienced some success to the north of Cassino but had culminated in the

austere ridges leading down from Monte Cairo to Monte Cassino. The high ground was a sinister scape of scrubby trees and bushes. Daylight movement brought the immediate retribution from the artillery observers. The ground was so hard that it was impossible to dig defensive positions. Instead, the men constructed small built-up stone shelters. There was not a trafficable route for motorized transport. All of the supplies including water arrived by foot or by mule. Medical evacuation was nearly impossible, and the corpses from both sides remained on the battlefield for months at a time. In the night, men fell to their deaths over unknown cliffs. Some drowned in the water-filled shell craters. The parallels to the World War I battlefield of Passchendaele were all too real. At a conference at II Corps, it became clear to Freyberg that the American commanders had lost touch with their troops. The Americans were unsure as to the location of all the units, and the division leadership had not been forward recently because of the long, risky trek into the hills. During the conduct of the relief in place of the American II Corps, the New Zealand Corps was appalled to find American soldiers so weak from exposure and illness that they could not walk under their own power and required stretcher bearers to move them off of the ridge.

Freyberg considered the seizure of Monastery Hill essential to the capture of Cassino. The promontory had been studied by the Italian war college as an example of a position made impregnable by nature. Despite subordinate recommendations and the apparent futility of frontal attacks conducted by his predecessor, General Freyberg adopted a strategy of frontal assault. Faced with the frontal assault of Monastery Hill, on 11 February 1944 Major General F. S. Tuker, commander of the 4th Indian Division,

asked for the “intense” continuous bombing of strong points on Monastery Hill.[16] The Abbey of Monte Cassino was included in the target list as an enemy strong point.

General Clark was opposed to the destruction of the monastery. He did not believe that the monastery itself was occupied by German forces. Clark consulted with the II Corps division commanders who concurred with his assessment. Freyberg was unimpressed with the opinions of the division commanders based on his experience during the relief. Freyberg was more persuaded by the opinion of the American soldiers in the hills who were convinced that the monastery was occupied. Clark also hypothesized that the ruins of the monastery would provide more advantageous defensive terrain to the Germans. If the Germans were not in the monastery, they certainly would occupy the ruins. Previous experience had shown that the aftermath of a bombardment only enhanced the defensibility of urban areas. Freyberg countered that a coordinated ground assault on the heels of the aerial bombardment of the monastery would not provide the Germans time to organize an effective defense. Ultimately, Clark left the decision to bomb the monastery to Alexander. Alexander approved the request and the mission was laid on.

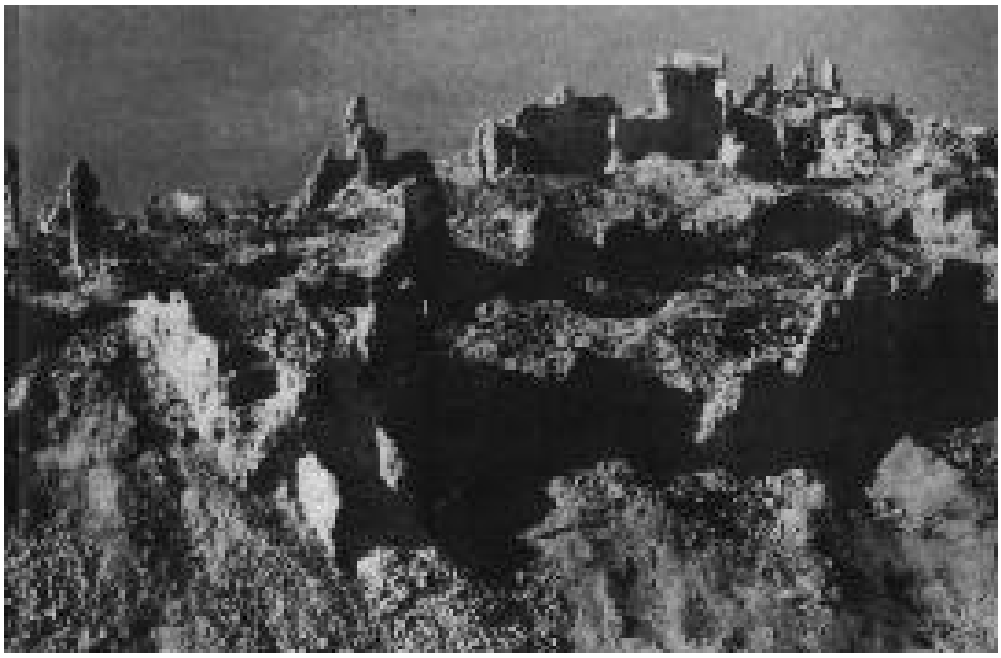

Fig. 3. The Ruins of the Abbey of Monte Cassino. *Source*: "Cassino e il Monastero," Associazione onlus Battaglia Di Cassino, available from http://www.dalvolturnoacassino.it/asp/images_main, Internet, accessed 21 January 2001

At 9:45 A.M. on 15 February 1944, the first wave of heavy and medium bombers released their payloads over the Abbey of Monte Cassino. At the time of the bombing, hundreds of refugees and wounded from the surrounding area were assembled in the chapel for morning services.[17] The 4th Indian Division was unaware of the timetable for the bombing and actually suffered severe casualties along their front lines from wayward munitions. The New Zealand Corps was unable to mount a regimental level attack for three days. The attacks failed miserably. After the bombing, the ruins of the monastery (figure 3) were occupied by German paratroopers who had survived the onslaught of Allied airpower without a single casualty. The Germans evacuated the seventy-eight-year-old abbot together with the monks and refugees who had survived the Allied bombing. The day after the bombing of the monastery, the Berlin radio read a signed

declaration by the abbot that stated, "I certify to be the truth that inside the enclosure of the sacred monastery of Cassino there never were any German soldiers."[18]

Because of the failure to coordinate the air and ground attacks, the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino was tactically irrelevant. Freyberg would alter his strategy after this disaster and attempt to seize the town of Cassino without controlling Monastery Hill. The ruins of one of the most sacred Christian sites and the lives of hundreds of civilians and brave soldiers were the price paid for Freyberg to learn that lesson. The German forces remained in the ruins of the Abbey of Monte Cassino until 18 May 1944 when they withdrew voluntarily after the position had been turned by forces occupying high ground to its rear.

The bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino is an example of an intricate situation that forced military commanders to make decisions not founded solely upon tactics. The four primary characters involved in the decision to bomb the Abbey of Monte Cassino were Tuker, Freyberg, Clark, and Alexander. These individuals permitted the bombing to occur because of a complex trinity of perceived military necessity, psychological necessity, and political necessity. In the end, the result was a military blunder that had a cost in lives and in misery.

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[1]John Ellis, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984), xiii.

[2]Fred Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino* (London: Cassell, 1957), 9.

[3]Janusz Piekalkiewicz, *The Battle for Cassino* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980), 8.

[4]Albert Kesselring, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Kesselring* (Novato, CA: Presido Press, 1989), 191.

[5]Piekalkiewicz, 11.

[6]David Hapgood and David Richardson, *Monte Cassino* (New York: Congdon and Weed, 1984), 30.

[7]Dominick Graham, *Cassino* (New York: Ballantine, 1970), 74.

[8]Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, vol. 3, *Salerno to Cassino* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969), 29.

[9]Martin Blumenson, *Mark Clark* (New York: Congdon and Weed, 1984), 3.

[10]Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 21.

[11]Ibid, 135.

[12]Ibid, 187.

[13]Mark W. Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 270.

[14]Graham, 29.

[15]Ibid, 35.

[16]Hapgood and Richardson, 152.

[17]Piekalkiewicz, 104.

[18]Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino*, 137.

CHAPTER 2

MILITARY NECESSITY

> General Alexander has decided that the monastery should be bombed if General Freyberg considers it a military necessity.[1]
>
> Lieutenant General John Harding, *Monte Cassino*

With this statement to the Fifth Army headquarters on the morning of 13 February 1944, the fate of the Abbey of Monte Cassino rested in the hands of Freyberg, the New Zealand Corps Commander. It is critical to this study to examine Freyberg and to determine the basis for his decision to bomb the Abbey of Monte Cassino.

Freyberg was a physically intimidating officer who was famous for his personal bravery. A New Zealand national swimming champion, Freyberg became a living legend when on the eve of the Gallipoli campaign in 1915 he swam ashore, a distance over two miles, in the Dardenelles to light diversionary flares on the Turkish coast. The exploit won him the first of three Distinguished Service Orders during World War I. Freyberg was later awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest military honor, in 1916 for personally leading his battalion despite three separate wounds during an attack that resulted in the capture of over 500 prisoners and sealed a dangerous gap in the front lines. During the interwar years, Freyberg would come within 500 meters of swimming the English Channel. He would also nearly lose a political bid for a seat in parliament. At the beginning of the Cassino action, Freyberg is the best known military leader in New Zealand history and had been wounded a total of thirty-six times.[2] Ultimately, it would be an aggravated stomach wound from Gallipoli that would cause his death in 1963.

Freyberg was unique in two ways. First, he was the only senior field commander of the First World War to hold an active field commander throughout the Second World War. Second, he was responsible directly to the government of New Zealand which gave him a measure of independence unmatched by any other divisional commander in the theater.[3]

With the declaration of war in 1939, the New Zealand government wanted to ensure that any New Zealand expeditionary forces would remain under national control. They did not want New Zealand forces employed in a piecemeal fashion similar to World War I. Freyberg was selected for command based on his military record and on the fact that he immigrated to New Zealand with his parents at the age of two. Prior to his appointment, Freyberg was fully aware that his command was a national force and subject to national oversight. He was also given a unique charter that allowed him the discretion of disregarding orders from military superiors who might needlessly jeopardize his troops.[4]

Freyberg took his responsibilities to the New Zealand government seriously. He had been criticized in North Africa for being overly cautious about risk. Freyberg responded that New Zealand with its small population had already shouldered disproportionate losses.[5] Freyberg's aversion to high casualties was clearly articulated just prior to the New Zealand Corps attack on Monastery Hill in February 1944. Freyberg told Major General Alfred M. Gruenther, Fifth Army Chief of Staff, that Freyberg would stop the attack if a thousand casualties were amassed and victory was not imminent.[6] It is not surprising given his background and responsibilities that Freyberg

would gravitate to options that presented the opportunity to harness the offensive might of air and artillery superiority.

The organization of the New Zealand Corps was improvised. The 2d New Zealand Division had been organized under the British V Corps in the Eighth Army sector prior to 17 January 1944 when it became the 15th Army Group reserve. The 2d New Zealand Division mission as the 15th Army Group reserve was be prepared to exploit a breakthrough in the Gustav Line. After Alexander ordered the transfer of 4th Indian Division to the Fifth Army area on 30 January, Freyberg was raised to the position of corps commander in the provisional New Zealand Corps. The provisional New Zealand Corps was composed of the 2d New Zealand Division, 4th Indian Division, and 78th British Division. It should be noted that the 78th British Division did not arrive in the Cassino area until 17 February 1944 and missed the initial attack planned by General Freyberg. General Freyberg received very little augmentation to form his corps staff. As a result, a large number of the more competent 2d New Zealand Division staff officers were reassigned to the corps staff while a large number of other performed double duty for the division and the corps. Freyberg discussed the status of his undermanned headquarters with General Harding on 8 February 1944 when Freyberg stated, "One has to consider whether one has a whole HQ or not. I don't think one can improvise. As the thing went on we might want help."[7] Alexander did have a spare corps headquarters available. The British V Corps completed its handover with the Canadian I Corps in the Eighth Army sector and was dispatched to Naples to become part of Army Group Reserve.

It is unclear why V Corps was not utilized. Prior to 17 January 1944, the British V Corps had been composed of the 2d New Zealand Division, 78th British Division, and the 8th Indian Division and, therefore, had a previous command relationship with two of the three divisions. Lieutenant General Sir Charles Allfrey, commander of V Corps, had experience in mountain warfare from Tunisia and had successful led the Eighth Army across the Straits of Messina and up the toe of Italy. The V Corps staff had practical experience in the planning of corps operations and could have proved invaluable in the creation of a viable plan especially when the responsibilities of the provisional corps were expanded to two possible axis of attack.

The Plan

The Fifth Army operations instructions of 5 February 1944 outlined the mission of the New Zealand Corps. They were to be an exploiting force that would assault through the Liri Valley after the American II Corps seized Monte Cassino.[8] The New Zealand Corps plan was to attack on a two division front along Route 6 and "employ the full power of the arty and air to blast through in a series of operations."[9] The 5th New Zealand Brigade conducted a relief in place of the American 36th Division opposite St. Angelo along the Rapido River, so the 36th Division could participate in American II Corps operations against key terrain in the high ground near Monastery Hill. The balance of the New Zealand Corps occupied assembly areas in preparation for the breakout.

As the American II Corps showed signs of culminating short of Monastery Hill on 8 February 1944, a change in plans was issued. The New Zealand Corps needed to be prepared to relieve the American 34th Division.[10] Freyberg and his staff now faced a dilemma. The original plan for the breakthrough still stood assuming that American II

Corps could seize Cassino. If the American II Corps failed, New Zealand Corps would assume the attack focused on the seizure of Monastery Hill. The two courses of action were along two totally different axes. A portion of the 2d New Zealand Division was already committed to the front line and could not be relieved. The British 78th Division had not yet arrived. Freyberg decided to move only the 4th Indian Division into position to support the possible attack along the ridge line towards Monastery Hill. Ultimately, the New Zealand Corps was passed the mission to seize Monastery Hill on 12 February 1944.

The relief in place of the American II Corps showed the difficulties of operations at Cassino. The four wheel drive trucks of the 4th Indian Division proved ineffective in moving along the deep muddy roads. After a number of accidents, the division borrowed light jeeps from the Americans. Unfortunately, one of the vehicles lost contained the entire reserve of hand grenades and mortar shells for the regiment that would later spearhead the 4th Indian Division attack.[11] The 4th Indian Division was horrified by the conditions of the units on the ridge. A large number of the soldiers had to be carried down the mountain due to illness and exposure. The corpses of Americans and Germans were widely spread across the battlefield and could not be retrieved due to the danger from snipers and artillery. The locations of units as briefed by the American II Corps headquarters were inconsistent with the physical location of the unit on the ground. It was clear to Freyberg that the American Corps leadership had not made the arduous journey to the front lines in the mountains.

Because of the precarious situation of the American VI Corps at Anzio, the attacks on the Gustav Line had to be sustained. Freyberg was given very little time to

formulate a plan. General Alphonse Juin, commander of the French Expeditionary Corps, approached Freyberg requesting that he support the French move through the mountains in an effort to isolate Monastery Hill. It was a suggestion supported by Tuker, commander of the 4th Indian Division. Freyberg discarded the French plan due to the complexity of supplying forces through the mountains in winter. Instead, Freyberg opted to approve a plan similar to the adopted by Major General Geoffrey Keyes, commander of II Corps, plan which conducted a frontal assault on Monastery Hill along the ridgeline to the northeast of the massif.

Freyberg failed to appreciate the difficulty of the terrain and became focused on the monastery. The ridges at Cassino when seen from a distance appeared to be smooth bare slopes. This distant impression concealed the nightmare faced by troops. It was actually rough broken ground with minor ridges, knolls, and hollows jumbled together. Huge boulders were scattered about while the gorges were often choked with thorn bushes. A knoll or ridge might seem to be a promising objective only to discover too late that it was commanded from an unlikely direction by another knoll or ridge. Because of the difficulty of the terrain, vehicles could not negotiate a way to the front lines. Neither Freyberg nor Brigadier General Harry K. Dimoline, acting 4th Indian Division commander after Tuker fell ill, ever went forward to observe the forward positions because of the huge time commitment required to make the trip by foot. Evidently, their presence at their respective headquarters was more important. The result was a tactical fixation on the Abbey of Monte Cassino versus a thorough assessment of the disposition of German forces.

Unsuitable Observation Post

It was clear that the Abbey of Monte Cassino stood on the summit of the key point of the heart of the Cassino defenses. What was not clear to Freyberg was whether the monastery was being used by the Germans. During the battle handover from the American II Corps to the New Zealand Corps, Brigadier General Frederic B. Butler, deputy commander of the 34th American Division stated, "I don't know but I don't believe the enemy is in the convent [sic]. All the fire has been from the slopes of the hill below the wall."[12] During the same briefing, a senior intelligence officer said, "With reference to the Abbey, we have had statements from our own observers who believe they have seen observing instruments in the windows. We have statements from civilians both for and against. Some have said that Germans are living there but this is not supported by others. It is very difficult to say whether it is being put to any military purpose at this time."[13] In his book *Neither Fear nor Hope*, German Lieutenant General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, commander of the German XIV Panzer Corps and lay Benedictine, denied that the Abbey of Monte Cassino was occupied by German forces and explained, "Even under the normal conditions Monte Cassino would never have been occupied by artillery spotter. True, it commanded a view of the entire district . . . but on our side it was considered tactical opinion that so conspicuous a landmark would be quite unsuitable as a observation post, since we could expect it to be put out of action by heavy fire very soon after the big battle had started."[14] Senger did permit a divisional provision to allow the evacuation of severely wounded to the monastery in the case of extreme danger. It was a provision that was never utilized while the monastery was intact.[15] Kesselring in his memoirs also denies that German forces occupied the Abbey of Monte

Cassino.[16] Because the Benedictine Order owned land for miles, Kesselring made the distinction that German troops could use the monastery grounds, but they could not enter the building itself.[17] The Americans generally opposed the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino. Clark, Keyes, and Major General Charles W. Ryder, commander of the American 34th Division, were all of the opinion that the bombing of the Monastery would not serve any military purpose. Of course, the opinion of the American generals was not necessarily supported by the soldiers on the ridge.

In the mind of Freyberg, the question of whether or not the Abbey of Monte Cassino was occupied became moot after Tuker made his opinion known. After failing to receive sufficient information from military intelligence sources, Tuker left his sick bed and went to Naples and scoured the bookshops until he found a book dated 1879 that detailed the construction of the monastery. The book described the massive ten-meter-long stone blocks used as the basis for construction and the ten-foot-thick walls. Tuker made his conclusions known to Freyberg in a memorandum that stated:

> Monte Cassino is therefore a modern fortress and must be dealt with by modern means. No practicable mean available within the capacity of field engineers can possibly cope with this place. It can only be directly dealt with by applying "block buster" bombs from the air, hoping thereby to render the garrison incapable of resistance. The 1,000 lbs bombs would be next to useless to effect this. Whether the Monastery is now occupied by a German Garrison or not, it is certain that it will be held as a keep by the last remnants of the Garrison of the position. It is therefore also essential that the building should be so demolished as to prevent its effective occupation at the time.[18]

Shortly after receiving Tuker's memorandum along with a request from Dimoline to bomb the monastery, Freyberg called Fifth Army headquarters and added the Abbey of Monte Cassino to his target list.

Clark opposed the bombing. By coincidence, Clark was at Anzio, instead of his headquarters, at the time of the request. Gruenther, Fifth Army Chief of Staff, was forced into an intermediator role between Freyberg, Clark, and 15th Army Group Headquarters. Clark and Gruenther argued the ruins of the monastery would benefit the defenders with improved fighting positions. They also raised the concern of refugees seeking shelter in the monastery. Ultimately, Alexander decided to approve the request of Freyberg.

By nightfall, a total of 576 tons of bombs would be dropped on the monastery. Between waves of bombers, artillery added to the destruction. After the war, 148 skulls were found in the ruins. All are believed to belong to civilians assembled in the chapel for morning services.[19] During the lull after the first wave of bombing, the refugees fled the monastery searching for safety only to be caught in the open as a second wave of bombers dropped their ordnance. The Monastery was in ruins but the official report of US Air Command conceded that the walls had been breached but not destroyed due to their extraordinary thickness.[20] A civilian who was present in the Monastery during the bombing would later relate to American forces that the monastery had been occupied by six monks and approximately 2,500 civilians. The civilian also related that there were no Germans in the monastery and all but one German position was at least 200 yards away from the monastery.[21] The seventy-eight-year-old abbot wrote a signed statement which stated, "I certify to be the truth that inside the enclosure of the sacred monastery of Cassino there never were any German soldiers; that there were for a certain period only three military police for the sole purpose of enforcing respect for the neutral zone which was established around the monastery."[22] It was a statement that was read on Berlin radio within twenty-four hours. In the aftermath of the bombing, the Germans prepared

for an attack. It was an attack that would not come for three days. In the interim, the Germans occupied the ruins of Monte Cassino and established a strongpoint that would never be defeated by direct action.

The Law

Ultimately, the question whether the decision to bomb the Abbey of Monte Cassino was warranted comes down to the definition of "military necessity." The 1940 version of Department of the Army Field Manual 27-10, *Rules of Land Warfare,* defines military necessity as "subject to the principles of humanity and chivalry, a belligerent is justified in applying any amount and any kind of force to compel the complete submission of the enemy with the least possible expenditure of time, life, and money."[23] The principles of humanity and chivalry are furthered defined within Field Manual 27-10. Humanity prohibits the "employment of any such kind or degree of violence as is not actually necessary for the purpose of war."[24] Chivalry prohibits the "resort to dishonorable means, expedients, or conduct."[25] The definition seems to have three conditions. The first is even an attack aimed at the military weakening of the enemy must not cause harm to civilians or civilian objects that is excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated. The second is an attack must be intended toward the military defeat of the enemy. The third is military necessity cannot justify violation of the rules of international humanitarian law.

In the case of Monte Cassino, the harm to civilians and historic property was excessive in relation to the military advantage anticipated. The original intent of the bombing was to "soften" the German forces in advance of an assault by the 4th Indian Division. On 14 February Freyberg knew that the 4th Indian Division was unprepared to

conduct the assault on Monastery Hill the next morning, yet he permitted the bombing to occur. Without a coordinated assault, there was no military advantage to the bombing of the monastery on 15 February. The harm to civilians and property was immense. Casualties of civilian refugees seeking shelter in the monastery reached into the hundreds. One of the most sacred Christian sites in Europe lay in ruins. Priceless historic documents and art were destroyed. Miraculously, the tomb of Saint Benedict was preserved although a large caliber artillery shell landed within a foot but failed to explode.

The bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino violated the letter of international law. The Hague Convention of 18 October 1907 addressed the use of bombardments. Article 27 specifically states: "In sieges and bombardments all necessary steps must be taken to spare, as far as possible, buildings dedicated to religion, art, science, or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals, and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not being used for military purposes." There is also a caveat to Article 27 that states: "It is the duty of the besieged to indicate the presence of such buildings or places by distinctive and visible signs, which shall be notified to the enemy beforehand."[26]

The Allies were fully aware of the religious and historic importance of the monastery. Fifth Army and the Mediterranean Air Command had issued guidance to all possible precautions to avoid damage to the monastery. This guidance was issued based in part from instructions originating with the Combined Chiefs of Staff that specified: "Consistent with military necessity, the position of the church and of all religious institutions shall be respected and all efforts made to preserve the local archives,

historical and classical monuments and objects of art." The Allies also had a reasonable expectation that civilians were taking refuge in the monastery. The reports of civilians are consistent with the fact that that the town of Cassino had been completely evacuated by the Germans. The monastery was a logical location for refugee concentrations.

The Allies had taken steps to clarify the status of the monastery. Sir D'Arcy Osborne, British Minister to the Vatican, had formally asked for assurances from the Vatican that the monastery was not being used for military purposes. Sir Osborne received a vague response on 14 February 1944 originating from the German Embassy that affirmed that there were not any considerable ("*grossere*") concentrations of German troops in the immediate vicinity of the monastery.[27] Although the response did not explicitly clarify the matter and there are some obvious trust issues between the belligerents, the response did not provide a positive indication that the Monastery was being used for a military purpose.

For the bombing not to be a violation of international law, the argument of Tuker must be accepted. Tuker did not care if the monastery was occupied by Germans at the moment of decision. To Tuker, the occupation of the monastery during the course of battle would provide the Germans with a military advantage. Fred Majdalany, an officer in the British 78th Division and noted historian on the battles of Monte Cassino, expands on that hypothesis. Majdalany states that the "simple inescapable fact is that the building was an integral part of the physical feature. The fortified mountain and the building at its summit were in military terms a single piece of ground."[28] Burleigh Cushing Rodick addressed a similar situation in his landmark 1928 book, *The Doctrine of Necessity in International Law*. Rodick concluded that a town that might provide shelter to a retiring

enemy meets the requirements of military necessity.[29] The obvious drawback to this argument in the case of the Abbey of Monte Cassino is that the ruins provided shelter on par, if not superior, to the monastery when undamaged.

While the military value of the monastery can be argued, it is undisputed that the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino was not intended towards the military defeat of the enemy. The New Zealand Corps was incapable of defeating the enemy at Monte Cassino in February 1944. During a conference of New Zealand Division officers on 22 January 1944, Freyberg discussed the probable role of the soon to be formed New Zealand Corps, "No doubt we shall be faced with either of two operations. 1. Breaking a gun line or 2. Crossing a river. We want to know why both 56 Division and the Americans failed. I have never known a river to really block an attack. Either there was something wrong with the recce, or there was something wrong with the plan. The sooner we can find out the better and learn a lesson from it."[30] The officers of the New Zealand 5th Brigade developed an optimum outline for operations. Ideally the attack would be conducted at night, the depth of the infantry objective would be a maximum to 2,000 yards, and the advance should not include the passing of more than one terrain feature.[31] At Monte Cassino, the German defenses were commonly 4,000 yards in depth. The Germans had carefully selected fighting positions so that each terrain feature had planned interlocking fire from other higher positions. Because of the strong forward defenses, the Allies were unable to conduct any reconnaissance and were unable to map a route through the maze of boulders, cliffs, thorns, mines, and machine guns. Because of the high casualty rate, the soldiers who had practical experience in the terrain were either in hospitals or dead or relieved. The German units at Cassino were motivated, well

trained, and adequately resourced. The only advantage that the Allies possessed was superior firepower, both air and artillery. The New Zealand Corps chose to focus that power at the one point on the hill that did not conceal German possesses.

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[1]David Hapgood and David Richardson, *Monte Cassino* (New York: Congdon and Weed, 1984), 170.

[2]Janusz Piekalkiewicz, *The Battle for Cassino* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980), 18.

[3]Fred Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino* (London: Cassell, 1957), 99.

[4]Laurie Barber and John Tonkin-Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salmander* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 2.

[5]Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg, VC: Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 409.

[6]Freyberg, 462.

[7]Barber and Tonkin-Covell, 200.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid, 195.

[10]Ibid, 200.

[11]Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino*, 110.

[12]Ibid, 122.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Frido Von Senger, *Neither Fear nor Hope: The Wartime Memoirs of the German Defender of Cassino* (Novato, CA: Presido Press, 1989), 202.

[15]Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, vol. 3, *Salerno to Cassino* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969), 413.

[16]Albert Kesselring, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Kesselring* (Novato, CA: Presido Press, 1989), 195.

[17]Dominick Graham, *Cassino* (New York: Ballantine, 1970), 74.

[18]Barber and Tonkin-Covell, 207.

[19]Hapgood and Richardson, 211.

[20]Piekalkiewicz, 104.

[21]Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 413.

[22]Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino*, 137.

[23]Department of the Army Field Manual, *Rules of Land Warfare* (Washington DC, US Government Printing Office, 1940), 1.

[24]Ibid, 2.

[25]Ibid.

[26]"Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land Hague IV; October 18, 1907," Yale Law School, available from http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon /lawofwar/hague04.htm, Internet, accessed 12 November 2001.

[27]Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino*, 123.

[28]Ibid, 118.

[29]Burleigh Cushing Rodick, *The Doctrine of Necessity in International Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), 63.

[30]Barber and Tonkin-Covell, 187.

[31]Ibid, 189.

CHAPTER 3

PSYCHOLOGICAL NECESSITY

> Since you ask me what I felt about the Monastery, I'll ask you something. Can you imagine what it is like to see a person's head explode in a great splash of grey brains and red hair . . . ? And can you imagine what it is like when that head belonged to your sister's fiancé? I knew why it happened, I was positive, it was because some bloody Jerry was up there in that bloody Monastery directing the fire that killed Dickie, and I know that still."[1]
>
> Lieutenant Bruce Foster, *Rome '44: The Battle for the Eternal City*

In his memoirs published eighteen years after his decision to approve the bombing of Abbey at Monte Cassino, Alexander stated his reason for the approval. Alexander wrote that "Every good commander must consider the morale and feelings of his fighting men and what is equally important, fighting men must know that their whole existence is in the hands of a man in whom they have complete confidence."[2] The statement reveals that military necessity was not the critical factor that weighed in Alexander's decision. Alexander's statement clearly portrays a decision based not on the disposition of German forces but on the psychological value of the monastery's destruction to the soldiers who fought under its glare.[3] With this knowledge, it is easy to look back at the language used by Alexander in February 1944 and see that he never professed the opinion that it was of military necessity to destroy the monastery. Alexander only states that he has faith in the judgment of Freyberg.[4] Were the conditions at Monte Cassino so grave to warrant such a drastic action to appease the psyche of the Allied forces? To comprehend Alexander's perception of the battlefield and how it influenced his decision, it is critical to understand the factors that affect the mental well being of a soldier, the magnitude of their presence at Monte Cassino, and options available to Alexander.

Combat Exhaustion

Following World War II, several studies were conducted regarding the relationship of the intensity and duration of combat to psychological disorders on the battlefield. The model presented by R. L. Swank and W. E. Marchland in 1946 (figure 4) outlines a sequence of conditions over a period of time with corresponding combat efficiency.[5] More recent studies have argued that a number of factors figure into the duration of each stage. The conclusions drawn by the Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, agrees with the phasing of the conditions as established by Swank and Marchand but believes the duration is determined by individual factors, unit factors, and battlefield factors.

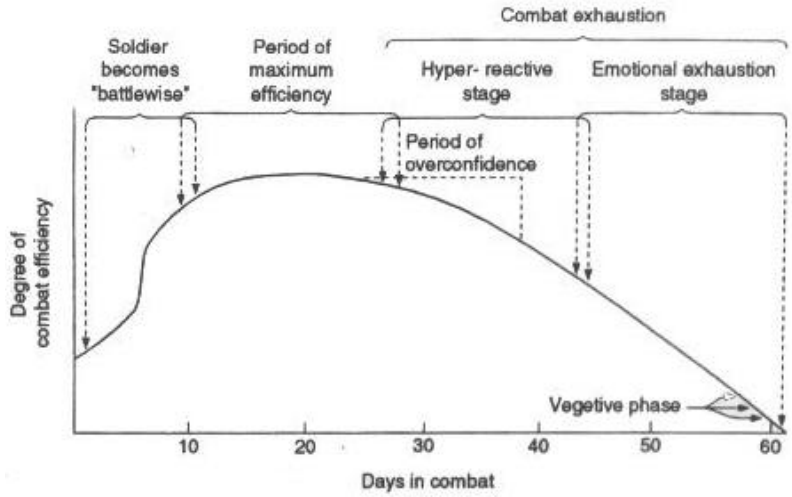

Fig. 4. Swank and Marchand Model. *Source*: R. L. Swank and W. E. Marchand, "Combat neuroses: development of combat exhaustion," *Archives of Neurology and Psychology* 55 (1946): 236-247.

The most important individual factor is the soldier's role in combat. The role of a soldier in combat often provides an associated resistance to psychological disorders. Positions with attached expectations, especially leadership and specialty skills, display a decreased likelihood of the holder of the position being a psychological casualty. Likewise, positions that offer soldiers some semblance of control and positions that require concentration to the point of distraction from the surrounding dangers also experience decreased rates of psychological disorders.

The general factors that determine the unit climate are confidence in commanders, confidence in oneself, and ideology. Soldier's confidence in their leaders is a critical element to resisting stress. The three aspects of a leader that inspired the most confidence among soldiers were professional competence, credibility, and the perception that the leader cares about the troops. Confidence in oneself focuses on elements common to the unit. Does the soldier understand his mission? Does he have the situational awareness of where enemy forces and friendly forces are? Is he comfortable moving in the terrain? The critical component of ideology is the legitimacy of the mission being undertaken. A lack of perceived legitimacy has a negative effect on unit cohesion and confidence in leadership.

The main battlefield factors are the types of battle, the length and intensity of combat, uncertainty and surprise, and environmental conditions. Dr. Reuven Gal and Dr. Franklin D. Jones describe the difference in types of battle as:

> Offensive and defensive operations differ in stress reactions. In defensive operations . . . the soldier is subjected to an enforced passivity and experiences a feeling of helplessness. By contrast, in offensive operations, even though the risk may be greater, the soldier is active, has a vicarious sense of control over the situation, and is distracted from personal concerns. Similarly, during static

> situations such as being pinned down for long periods, perhaps by artillery fire or similar situations of immobility, stress casualties are higher than in mobile situations such as advancing or even retreating.[6]

There is a correlation between the intensity of the fighting and the onset of combat exhaustion. Soldiers involved in pitched close quarters combat were more likely to exhibit symptoms of combat exhaustion. A critical factor is that the combat must be continuous. Soldiers out of contact and out of observation range of combat were able to break the cycle.[7] Uncertainty appears in two forms: the uncertainty of an event in time and the uncertainty of the outcome of an event. The level of uncertainty is proportional to the level of stress experienced. Environmental conditions also increase combat stress. The physiological stresses of extreme heat or cold and inclement weather added to psychological stresses degrade the soldier's ability to cope. "Masked psychiatric conditions ranging from frostbite . . . to dehydration . . . exemplify the relationship between combat breakdown and adverse environments."[8]

While extensive, the report of the Office of the Surgeon General does not specifically address certain additional critical factors that have been found to be critical by other researchers. The well respected Dr. Bartlett identified prolonged states of fatigue as the most predominant precursor to nervous and mental disorders.[9] The four factors of: (1) sympathetic nervous response to an excited psychological state during combat, (2) cumulative loss of sleep, (3) reduction in food consumption, and (4) the impact of the elements combine to form the "weight of exhaustion."[10] Only the first three will be addressed since the fourth was already covered.

Under normal conditions, there is a balance between the sympathetic nervous system, which controls the expenditure of bodily energy resources, and the

parasympathetic nervous system, which controls the digestive and recuperative processes in the body.[11] During combat, the sympathetic nervous system utilizes all available energy reserves in the body for the purpose of survival. If the stress of combat is prolonged over a period of days, the sympathetic nervous system will override the parasympathetic nervous system to maintain the desired faculty acuteness to the detriment of the overall physical well-being of the soldier.[12]

The sounds and demands of the battlefield also limit the quantity and quality of the sleep for troops in the frontline. A study determined that thirty-one percent of the American soldiers in Italy during 1944 averaged less than four hours of sleep per night. It is assumed that the majority of this population came from frontline units.[13] The loss of sleep is also cumulative. The longer a soldier goes without sleep; the more sleep is required to recover the balance of his faculties. The loss of sleep and irregular sleeping patterns also interfere with normal physiological functions.[14]

The energy stores expended by the sympathetic nervous system must be replaced in the form of food. Because of fatigue, soldiers will often pass on chances to eat in favor of rest. The effects of malnutrition are similar to the effects of sleep deprivation. Both cause soldiers to become susceptible to cold and cause increasing apathy.[15] Logistical problems may prevent the ready availability of food. Further, the food may be unappetizing because of preparation or serving temperature. Regardless of cause, the reduction in caloric intake accentuates exhaustion.[16]

Coping Mechanisms

To help mitigate the destructive nature of stress on the battlefield, soldiers employ a number of coping mechanisms. Jules Masserman states that the defense of the human

psyche rests on three tenets. The first is that an individual has the ability to influence his situation. The soldier must believe that his actions have a direct impact on his situation. If the soldiers perceives his well being is subject to random chance, his actions become apathetic. The second is that someone will come to their aid. In an environment of increasing danger, soldiers will depend upon a buddy, leaders, or God to come to their aid in the time of need. The third is that by enduring they will survive. The will to survive is strong. As long as a soldier believes there is a chance of survival, he will maintain a level of mental acuteness. Once a soldier loses the will to survive, his mental capacity quickly degenerates to ineffectiveness.

Group Dynamic

According to Richard Gabriel, "one of the first faculties to degenerate under stress is the ability to process information and make decisions."[17] Dr. F. C. Bartlett describes a curious fact associated with the group psychology of men in combat. They become particularly vulnerable to periods of heightened suggestibility. Soldiers are quick to believe and to pass along stories of enemy atrocities even in the absence of credible evidence.[18] In the case of the Abbey of Monte Cassino, it was rumored that the Germans had looted the monastery of all its priceless art work.[19] It was also commonly believed by Allied soldiers and universally reported in the Allied press that the monastery was occupied by German observers and fortified gun positions. Despite the fact that Monastery Hill and the associated ridge line offered similar if not better positions, the focus always returned to the unblemished walls of the monastery. It was a focus that was not dissuaded by the Allied leadership.

"Cemetery for the Living"

An examination of the situation through the eyes of a battalion operations officer provides an insight into the psychological factors present on the battlefield at Monte Cassino. As the operations officer of the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Butler, then just a young captain, described the harshness of the conditions on the soldiers. The rocky terrain prevented the digging of fighting positions, instead "coffin-shaped" stone shelters were constructed. The observation and proximity of the Germans required his soldiers to remain concealed and silent during daylight hours. Any movement outside of the shelters was greeted with a sniper's bullet or the impact of mortars. Leaders could only check the conditions of their soldiers at night. The intermittent snow and rain created conditions favorable for cold weather injuries along the windswept ridges. Soldiers would alternate two hour shifts of standing guard, resting, and rubbing each other's feet to prevent the onset of frostbite. Food arrived by mule train and was always cold since no fires were permitted. There was very little available water. The winter clothing provided to the soldiers was poor. Soldiers would huddle together in pairs in their shelters under blankets on a bed of stone and try to sleep. The ever present sound of artillery and rockets would echo through the mountains. Most soldiers found it difficult to sleep with the anxiety of a possible attack, the sound and vibration of indirect fire, and the discomfort and cold of their shelter. The lack of bathing water, the difficulty of digging latrines, and the lack of liberty to move during the day caused extremely unsanitary conditions. The soldiers quickly became ill. Many starting skipping meals or just stopped eating, only exasperating their physical conditions. Soldiers would ask Butler during his nightly visits to the frontlines, "How

much longer are we going to have to sit here and take this punishment?" Butler was contemptuous of the regimental leadership. The regimental commander never made the four hour trek from his command post to the frontlines. The regimental commander failed to give weight to Butler's assessment that the men were physically unable to conduct an attack. On 3 February 1944, seven days after the battalion began its attack, Butler described the unit morale as high with a strong confidence of victory. On 12 February 1944, units from the Fourth Indian Division relieved Butler's battalion. The relief in place was suppose to be conducted on 13 February, but the British officer during his initial inspect of the position on the morning of 12 February became concerned that some of Butler's men would not survive for another twenty-four hours. Of the original 800 men, only 200 still occupied positions on the mountain. Many of those were so weak that they had to be carried away on stretchers.[20] Fred Majdalany, an officer with the British 78th Division, observed similar conditions during his time in the mountains. He would ultimately describe it simply as a "cemetery for the living."[21]

From Lieutenant Colonel Butler's description, a number of the factors of combat exhaustion can be identified. The individual soldier had little control over their situation. His awareness of enemy locations and his ability to move with some semblance of confidence in the terrain were nearly nil. He was in a static position facing the uncertainty of a German attack. To many soldiers, the whole purpose of the Italian campaign was unclear. The environmental conditions, noises of battle, and anxiety of possible attack limited his sleep. Logistical difficulties and sanitary conditions directly impacted the availability and nutritious value of the food delivered. There was a perception of disconnection between the regimental leadership and the realities of front

line service. The question of the soldier, “How much longer are we going to have to sit here and take this punishment?” voices at least two of the coping mechanisms. The soldier wants to do something to change the situation, and he is pleading with a leadership figure to make a decision that will help him survive. Clearly the soldiers had transitioned through all of Swank and Marchand’s phases and were in a state of combat exhaustion.

Soldier Perception

The Abbey of Monte Cassino assumed a sinister role in the lives of the soldiers that it overlooked. The monastery personified the strength and omnipotent observation of the German forces. It was an idea that was reinforced in the media of the time. Newsreels superimposed German soldiers with binoculars over pictures of the monastery. Newspapers and magazines condemned the Germans for emplacing observers and artillery into the monastery. The fact that the historic landmark was off-limits to ground or air attack only added the sensation of frustration that the Allied soldiers felt. The psychological stress of the battlefield created conditions that enhanced the suggestibility of the soldiers and shaped the seemingly inescapable conclusion that the Germans had occupied the monastery and were using it as a base of operations to systematically destroy the Fifth Army.

In the minds of the Allied soldiers, the monastery had transformed from an inanimate building to a mechanism of destruction. Like steel formed into a tank, the monastery was stone formed into an omnipotent fortress that rained artillery shells on all those that it saw. Dr. Ben Shalit defines an opponent as an “animal, vegetable, mineral, or abstract element perceived to be behaving in a mode that is incongruent with our aims.

An opponent stands in our way, passively. The effects of an opponent are felt in proportion to the extent of our actions on it, when we act on it." Conversely, an "enemy is an opponent perceived to be behaving in a mode that actually threatens our aims. An enemy actively challenges our desired state or actions, and his gain is perceived to be our loss."[22] The Abbey of Monte Cassino was not perceived as a disinterested neutral or a passive opponent. To the soldiers below, it was the enemy. And to win, the enemy had to be destroyed.

Flow of Information

If the task of visiting frontline units was perceived as too arduous for regimental commanders, clearly Alexander was not making the trek to observe the conditions. If Alexander perceived a lack of confidence in the leadership by the troops, how did he get this information? How were the perceptions of the troops relayed to Alexander?

Alexander was known to communicate directly with corps and divisional commanders without the knowledge of Clark. These lines of communication outside the normal chain of command were usually between Alexander and other British Commonwealth commanders. The two most obvious examples during the Italian campaign were Major General W. R. C. Penny, commander of the British 1st Infantry Division, and Freyberg. Alexander admitted to Clark that he received most of his information on the day to day events at Anzio from Penny.[23] Alexander's interaction with Freyberg on the issue of Monte Cassino began when Alexander requested Freyberg make a recommendation on the employment of the New Zealand Corps at Monte Cassino. He made the request without the knowledge or input of Clark or the Fifth Army. When Clark found out he was quick to voice his disapproval.[24] There is no

indication that Clark's objections decreased the level of traffic between Alexander and Freyberg. At the time of the request to bomb the monastery, Freyberg passed his rationale to both the Fifth Army Headquarters and the 15th Army Group Headquarters.[25] While Clark along with his chief of staff, Gruenther, were meticulous in their documentation of the events surrounding the bombing, the same can not be said for records kept by the New Zealand Corps and the Army Group Headquarters.

During a final phone conversation on the matter on the morning of 13 February 1944, Clark talked directly to Alexander to make his position clear. Clark stated that there was no indication that the monastery was being used by the Germans, that the monastery would provide improved defensive positions to the Germans after being bombed because the complete destruction of the monastery was doubtful, that there were indications that the monastery was being used as a shelter for women and children, and, if it were an American commander making the request, that Clark would have denied the request. Alexander only responded that if Freyberg wanted the monastery bombed then it should be bombed. Although Alexander does not mention any direct communication between himself and Freyberg during the conversation, it is hard to believe that if Clark was the principle point of contact for information from the Fifth Army that Alexander would not accept his recommendation.

Alexander already knew there were morale problems at Monte Cassino. During the transition from American II Corps to the New Zealand Corps, Alexander ordered Brigadier General Lyman L. Lemnitzer to Monte Cassino to assess the impact the ongoing battle had on morale. Lemnitzer talked to unit commanders and front line troops. Lemnitzer reported back to Alexander that the troops were "disheartened, almost

mutinous."[26] This assessment would play a major role in Alexander's decision to approve the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino.

Alexander's Options

Given the information available and the time critical decision required, what were the options available to Alexander? What were the risks and rewards associated with those options? Given the psychological rationale adopted by Alexander, the options were not weighted by their effect on the Germans but on the morale of the Allied soldier.

The first option was to make a decision based on the facts provided by Clark. It would appear that Alexander agreed for the most part with Clark's tactical and factual assessment. The risk of not bombing was to be perceived as lacking compassion for the soldier. The soldier would believe that the existence of the monastery outweighed the value of his life. It would be a passive decision with a negative impact on morale. The reward was the preservation of a historic structure that was housing displaced persons from the evacuated town of Cassino. It would also preserve assets to be employed at other locations in the area that were known to be occupied by Germans.

The second option was to make a decision based on the monastery's military value as perceived by a divisional commander, Tuker, and supported by a corps commander, Freyberg. The risk was to cause unnecessary suffering on the monks and refugees seeking refuge in the monastery. There was also the certain condemnation that would accompany the destruction of one of the most sacred sites in Europe. There was also the risk that the German defensive position would be strengthened by the occupation of the ruins in the bombings aftermath as foreseen by Clark. The reward was the certain

elevation in soldier morale. It would increase the confidence of soldiers in their leadership. It would be an active decision with a defining result.

Another option available was to delay the decision until Allied officials could work through the Vatican and come to a consensus on the actual disposition of the monastery. The risk associated with a delay was the continued isolation of the force at Anzio. Ultra intercepts gave indications of a German buildup in preparation for a counteroffensive at Anzio.[27] A successful attack against Cassino might relieve some of the pressure against the beachhead. The reward would be a clear understanding of the disposition of the monastery and the establishment of well defined rules of engagement in regard to the monastery.

The option that does not appear to have been contemplated by Alexander was to inform soldiers of the tactical liability the monastery presented to the Germans while it remained intact. The risk was that Allied soldiers would not believe the information provided by the chain of command. It would require a well conceived plan of information dissemination and the willingness of commanders to talk and explain the situation first hand to the soldiers. The reward was strict adherence to the laws and rules of war, and morale was maintained or elevated by its continued presence.

Psychological Impact of the Bombing for Allied Soldiers

In his final analysis, the primary reason for the decision to bomb the Abbey of Monte Cassino was based on Alexander's perception that the rank and file needed to see it destroyed. In his memoirs, Alexander asks the rhetorical questions: "Was the destruction of the monastery a military necessity? Was it morally wrong to destroy it?" His response to the first question is "It was necessary more for the effect it would have on

the morale of the attackers than for purely material reasons." In his response to the second question, although obviously linked to the first, Alexander states that "the commanding general must make it absolutely clear to his troops that they go into action under the most favorable conditions he has the power to order."

Correspondent John Lardner, in an article for *Newsweek*, described the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino as the "most widely advertised single bombing in history." Lardner describes a pause in time when every soldier for miles stood and listened to the sounds of the bombers approaching and watched as the monastery was consumed within clouds of dust and debris. The collected group anxiously waited for the dust to clear. With the view of the altered outline of the monastery, there was an "easing of tension."[28] The soldiers that gathered on various vantage points cheered as the subsequent waves of aircraft dropped their ordinance on the monastery. Some would bemoan the delay in the bombing and wonder openly why it had not been done weeks earlier.[29] Others would merely cry in joy.

While it may have been the "most widely advertised single bombing in history," apparently the only units that did not know of the time of the bombing were the four front line battalions of the 4th Indian Division. The brigade headquarters was under the impression that the bombing mission was scheduled for the following day. The Indian units sustained casualties. Units seemingly distant from the monastery also felt the effects of inaccurate bombing. Of all places, sixteen bombs were mistakenly dropped within yards of Clark's headquarters seventeen miles away, fortunately only minor structural damage occurred.[30]

From a tactical perspective, the bombing served no purpose. Allied forces did not hold key terrain to even attempt a direct assault on Monastery Hill. Prior to the bombing, the monastery was a limitation to the German defense. It decreased the mobility of the German defenders who had to move around its periphery. Some German positions could not be properly supported. With the destruction of the monastery, the Germans were able to occupy the ruins and provide strength and depth to their defenses. With the elimination of this huge dead space in their defenses along with the asset of the underground monastery cellars, the Germans would be able to strengthen their strangle hold on Monastery Hill.

While there may have been a general elevation in the morale of the soldiers throughout the battlefield around Monte Cassino, the target audience that Alexander was trying to influence with his decision was the soldiers that would be conducting the assault against Monastery Hill. If anything, the evidence points to decrease in morale in the period after the bombing. The soldiers suffered casualties in a friendly fire situation. There was an obvious lack of communication between levels of command. The front-line units still lacked situational awareness of the disposition of the enemy. They were now under increased pressure to succeed and to succeed now. In the three days of fighting after the bombing of the monastery, nearly forty officers and 600 soldiers were killed, wounded, or missing from the four front line battalions of the 4th Indian Division.[31] With the failure of the assault, the menacing form of the monastery ruins elevated its deadly status in the minds of the Allied soldiers. It was a feature that could not be taken despite the weight of the concentrated effort of the Fifth Army and the Mediterranean Allied Air Force.

[1]Realeigh Trevelyan, *Rome '44: The Battle for the Eternal City* (New York: Viking, 1981), 129-130.

[2]E. D. Smith, *The Battles of Cassino* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 89.

[3]Nigel Nicolson, *Alex: The Life of Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 246.

[4]Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, vol. 3, *Salerno to Cassino* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969), 405.

[5]Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little Brown, 1995), 44.

[6]"Textbook of Military Medicine: War Psychiatry," Virtual Naval Hospital, available from http://www.vnh.org/warpsychiatry, Internet, accessed 31 January 2002.

[7]Grossman, 43-44.

[8]"Textbook of Military Medicine: War Psychiatry."

[9]F. C. Bartlett, *Psychology and the Soldier* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1927), 77.

[10]Grossman, 69.

[11]Ibid, 70.

[12]Ibid, 43-44.

[13]Ibid, 71-72.

[14]Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behavior of Men in Battle* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 124.

[15]Ibid, 125.

[16]Grossman, 72.

[17]Richard A. Gabriel, *No More Heroes* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 81.

[18]Bartlett, 177.

[19]"Allies Prepared to Save Abbey Art," *New York Times*, 8 February 1944, 4.

[20]Arthur L. Kelly, *BattleFire! Combat Stories from World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press, 1997), 68-73.

[21]Fred Majdalany, *The Monastery* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1945), 15-17.

[22]Ben Shalit, *The Psychology of Conflict and Combat* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 84.

[23]Mark W. Clark, *General Mark W. Clark Diary* vol. 6 (The Citadel Archives and Museum, Charleston), 16 February 44.

[24]Clark, *Clark Diary*, 4 February 44.

[25]Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg, VC: Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 461.

[26]John Ellis, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984), 130-131.

[27]Laurie Barber and John Tonkin-Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salmander* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 213.

[28]John Lardner, "Ringside Seat at the Bombing of Monte Cassino," *Newsweek*, 28 February 1944, 27.

[29]David Hapgood and David Richardson, *Monte Cassino* (New York: Congdon and Weed, 1984), 203.

[30]Clark, *Clark Diary*, 15 February 44.

[31]Dominick Graham, *Cassino* (New York: Ballantine, 1970), 79.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICAL NECESSITY

> If I had been well enough to be at his [Alexander's] side as I had hoped at the critical moment I could have given him the necessary stimulus.[1]
>
> Churchill, *Rome '44: The Battle for the Eternal City*

While the primary consideration that motivated Alexander's decision to bomb the Abbey of Monte Cassino may have been the psychological value imparted on the Allied soldiers, it was not the only consideration. A secondary consideration that carried enormous weight was the political pressures associated with the command of a multinational army group. While the defeat of Nazi Germany was the central objective, each Allied country brought its own national agenda and national interests in the political arena. As a British officer in a British dominated theater of operations, Alexander was expected to ensure that British interests were held paramount. It was an expectation that was repeatedly enforced with the near daily guidance received from Churchill. Alexander also understood the possible impact of his decisions on the international political balance as well. With subordinates from all the major Allied countries but Russia, Alexander realized that commanders like Freyberg felt obligations to represent their national interests and to provide national prestige.

Winston Churchill

Of all the political leaders in World War II, Winston Churchill had the most extensive wartime experience. He had eight years experience as either an Army officer or military correspondent in Cuba, India, Sudan, and South Africa. Churchill also served in the military during World War I. He was given command of the 6th Royal Scots

Fusiliers after his departure from the government following the ill fated Gallipoli operation which he was a staunch supporter. Churchill's experiences during World War I shaped the way he organized and managed the military during his tenure as prime minister in World War II. [2]

After becoming Prime Minister in 1940, Churchill made structural changes in the government that centralized operations. The changes had the effect of making him head of government and supreme commander of the armed forces. He would meet daily with the chiefs of staff. The concentration of power in the hands of Churchill would gradually exclude both the War Cabinet and Parliament from any meaningful role in the formulation of strategy. Churchill established a constant stream of orders, memoranda, and directives to his generals in the field to help mitigate his suspected lack of initiative on their part.[3]

It was the constant objective of Churchill to garner American support for operations in the Mediterranean theater.[4] Churchill was always competing against the American desire to execute a cross channel invasion of Europe. To the Unites States, the straight line approach to Berlin was the surest way to victory.[5] American planners saw operations in the Mediterranean as diverting resources needed for the European invasion. While the American focus was the cross channel invasion of Europe, the British were committed to a strategy of protecting their empire. At the time of the United States entrance into World War II, the bulk of British forces were engaged in the Middle East. Finally, in the summer of 1942, Mr. Churchill convinced President Roosevelt that an invasion of North Africa was the best course of action. The invasion, titled Operation

Torch, would take place in November 1942 to help reduce the pressure on British forces in Egypt.[6]

Churchill would again rely upon his relationship with President Roosevelt to win support for the Sicily invasion during the Casablanca Conference in January 1943. The objectives of the Sicily invasion were to secure shipping lanes in the Mediterranean, to dissipate German forces on the Russian front, and to force Italy out of the war.[7] With secure shipping lanes, the lend-lease routes to Russia and the route through the Suez Canal would be unhampered. The thinning of German lines to face a new threat in southern Europe would help the Russians and help set the stage for the cross channel invasion. There was also a widespread assumption within the Allies that an Italian collapse would cause a German withdrawal from Italy.[8] While the United States did commit to the invasion of Sicily, it did not commit to any further operations in the Mediterranean after the Sicily.

During the Trident Conference held in Washington DC in May 1943, the plan for the invasion of Sicily, now named Operation Husky, was approved by Allied leaders. They also confirmed their goals of forcing Italy out of the war and fixing the largest possible number of German units. The Americans remained focused on the cross channel invasion of Europe and opposed any further operations beyond Sicily that might delay Operation Overlord. The eventual agreement stipulated that Eisenhower was to plan the Sicily campaign with the objective of eliminating Italy from the war.[9]

Churchill sensed the opportunity to influence the situation and flew almost immediately to Algiers to meet with Eisenhower. Churchill was determined to receive assurances from Eisenhower that Italy would be invaded if Sicily were taken.

Eisenhower would only agree that a favorable opportunity to invade Italy should be exploited.[10]

Eisenhower established two planning staffs to address two courses of action. The first was an invasion of Sardinia and Corsica. The second was an invasion of southern Italy. The advantages of a Sardinia and Corsica operation were the Allies were not bound to an unalienable line of advance. The disadvantage was the loss of Sardinia and Corsica might not cause the Italian surrender. If further action was required, the landing craft might not be available as critical resources were shifted back to Britain in preparation for Overlord.[11] The invasion of southern Italy had several benefits. Besides being the more decisive operation, southern Italy would provide potential staging areas for operations in the Balkans. The invasion of southern Italy was attractive to Allied air commanders. Bases in Italy would bring targets in southern Germany and Romania within heavy bomber range. Additionally, the air assets would not be required to cross the well established air defense belts along traditional air routes from Britain.[12]

Eisenhower would eventually make the recommendation to the Combined Chiefs of Staff that the invasion of Italy should be undertaken. At the time of the recommendation, the Badoglio government in Italy was secretly negotiating with Eisenhower the surrender of Italy. Eisenhower felt that the invasion of the Italian mainland would be a culminating event for the Italian government. The invasion would also satisfy the requirement to tie up as many German units as possible. The Allied leadership approved the operation using the name Operation Avalanche. On 3 September 1943, Montgomery's Eighth Army landed on the toe of the Italian boot at Calabria. Six

days later, Clark's Fifth Army landed at Salerno. The Allies were now committed to the Italian Campaign.

As the champion of the Italian Campaign, Churchill linked himself to the success or failure of the operation. It was something that he had done before. During World War I as the First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill had advocated the use of amphibious operations to seize the Dardanelles and force the Ottoman Empire out of the war. It was a position that would lead to his removal from the cabinet in 1915. It is easy to believe that Churchill was aware of the similarities, and he was unwilling for history to repeat itself.

Clark described Churchill's role in the Italian Campaign as "super commander in chief."[13] Churchill was responsible for naming Wilson as the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean Theater after Eisenhower's transfer to lead Operation Overlord. Churchill opted to leave Alexander as the 15th Army Group Commander to fight the Italian Campaign. [14] With the appointment of Wilson, the British assumed the decision making role for operations in Italy. It was a role that Churchill relished and executed with vigor. Churchill understood that war often created as many problems as it solved. With American focus and predominance in Operation Overlord and the obvious position of influence in the east of the Russians, the Mediterranean Theater and Italy in particular became the obvious sphere of future influence for the British.[15] Churchill maintained nearly daily contact with his senior commanders in the theater including Alexander. It was through these cables that Churchill was able to influence operations. Besides the cables, Churchill had stationed a personal representative in the theater of operations.[16]

While no evidence was found that Churchill provided his opinion on the status of the monastery to Alexander prior to the decision to bomb, it is unfathomable that Alexander did know the position of the prime minister. It is noteworthy that Alexander in his memoirs would include the observations of Churchill in his brief description of the Abbey of Monte Cassino.

> Till the February bombardment, the great Benedictine monastery had been spared deliberately, to our detriment. Whether the Germans took advantage of its deep cellars for shelter and its high windows for observation I do not know; but it was obvious that this huge and massive building offered the defenders considerable protection from hostile fire, merely by their sheltering under its walls. As Winston Churchill has observed, the enemy fortifications were hardly separate from the building itself.[17]

Freyberg and the New Zealand Corps

The opinion of Churchill was not the only concern of Alexander. The introduction of the New Zealand Corps to the Cassino area added a new dimension to the political landscape of forces. The commitment of the New Zealand Corps in the Mediterranean Theater had been an issue in the past. Late in 1942 with the war in the Pacific reaching the Australian coast, both the Australian and New Zealand governments considered redeploying their forces in North Africa to the Pacific to serve in a role more closely related to their national defense. Disregarding the recommendation by the Combined Chiefs of Staff for the retention of the 9th Australian Division in North Africa, the Australian government ordered the division home after the battle of Alamein. During secret session of the New Zealand House of Representatives, a similar proposal was considered. The New Zealand House of Representatives decided to leave the 2d New Zealand Division in place.[18]

The issue of the New Zealand contingent would arise again as planning began for the invasion of Sicily. Previously, the New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser had stated that the disposition of the 2d New Zealand Division would be reviewed after the North Africa campaign. Mr. Fraser also stated that any future deployment of the 2d New Zealand Division would have to be approved by the New Zealand House of Representatives. With victory in North Africa still several weeks away, Freyberg was approached about the participation of the 2d New Zealand Division in the invasion of Sicily. Given the position of the New Zealand government, Freyberg refused to commit his forces to the operation.[19]

Ultimately, the New Zealand House of Representatives would approve a New Zealand War Cabinet recommendation to make the 2d New Zealand Division available for European operations. One of the critical factors in the decision was a special message from Churchill which strongly requested the commitment of the New Zealand contingent to future operations in the Mediterranean.[20] After a period of reorganization and training, the 2d New Zealand Division arrived in Italy, was assigned to the British Eighth Army, and was ready for operations in November 1943.[21]

When Alexander transferred the newly created New Zealand Corps from the British Eighth Army to the American Fifth Army, Alexander discussed the status of the New Zealand Corps with Clark and informed him "of the difficulty the British had in handling the New Zealanders, explaining that they were territorial troops, responsible only to their government."[22] Clark passed these thoughts along to Keyes, American II Corps Commander. Clark explained "these are dominion troops who are very jealous of

their prerogatives. The British have found them difficult to handle. They have always been given special consideration which we would not give to our own troops."[23]

The reason for the "special consideration" was the charter given to Freyberg. When the New Zealand government appointed Freyberg as commander of New Zealand land forces in the Middle East, the government outlined the method of employment for those forces. The charter has four basic points. First, Freyberg would keep the government informed on the employment and disposition of forces under his command. Second, the administration and discipline of the New Zealand forces would be under New Zealand control. Third, the New Zealand forces would not be committed to an operation unless adequately trained and equipped. Lastly, the force would remain intact and not employed in a piecemeal formation and not used for replacements.[24]

It was the unique circumstances of Freyberg's command that raised the issue of the bombing from the headquarters of Clark to the headquarters of Alexander. At the direction of Clark, Gruenther included a memorandum outlining the events of 12 February 1944 in Clark's diary. Gruenther describes a phone conversation with Harding where Gruenther stated:

> Gen. Clark does not think that the building should be bombed, and that if the commander of the New Zealand Corps were an American commander he would give specific orders that it would not be bombed. However, in view of Gen. Freyberg's position in the British Empire forces, the situation was a delicate one, and Gen. Clark hesitated to give such an order without first referring the matter to Gen. Alexander. Gen. Clark is still of the opinion that no military necessity exist for the destruction of the Monastery.[25]

The request was probably not a surprise to Alexander. Alexander and Harding had visited Freyberg's headquarters several hours before the request for the bombing was submitted to Clark's headquarters.[26] Alexander was faced with the same problems as

Clark in his dealings with Freyberg. In a taped interview with Cassino historian David W. Richardson, Clark recounts a conversation with Alexander on the morning of 13 February 1944, "Remember, Wayne, he [Freyberg] is a very important cog in the Commonwealth effort. I would be most reluctant to take responsibility for his failing and for his telling this people 'I lost 5,000 New Zealanders because they wouldn't let me use air as I wanted.'"[27] While Clark's diary does not collaborate this specific statement, the diary does state that Alexander did call Clark on the morning of 13 February 1944. In the diary, Clark states that "Alexander was quite insistent that it [the monastery] be bombed if Freyberg wanted it--another evidence of his unduly interfering with Fifth Army activities and doing business direct with my subordinates. It shows that he [Alexander] is most reluctant, even over my objection, in doing anything in disapproving an action of Freyberg for political reasons."[28]

National Prestige

To get the bombing mission approved, Freyberg had tested the limits of his influence within the chain of command of the Mediterranean Theater. As the circumstances developed around the bombing, Freyberg would feel the watchful eyes of the Americans and British and cause him to make an ill fated decision. Freyberg would allow the bombing mission to proceed with the full understanding that it would not serve any tactical purpose. It was a decision made to limit ridicule and preserve the prestige of the New Zealand Corps.

Originally, the bombing of the monastery had been scheduled for the morning of 13 February 1944. Freyberg called the Fifth Army Headquarters and requested that the bombing be delayed because troops near the monastery could not be moved back in

time.[29] A similar request was submitted by Ryder, commander of the American 34th Infantry Division. II Corps was still in the process of completing its relief in place with the New Zealand Corps, and Ryder had units along the bomb safety line. Ryder forcefully expressed his position during a phone call with II Corps headquarters on the morning of 13 February 1944, "Make clear with air force that I will not accept that bombing. I am in command of this sector and will not permit any other bombing than what I put out myself."[30] The bombing was delayed from the 13th until the 16th.

An important consideration in the timing of the bombing was the weather. Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker, commander of the Mediterranean Allied Air Force, ordered 142 B-17 Flying Fortresses, 40 B-26 Marauders, and 47 B-25 Mitchells[31] to participate in the bombing of the monastery. It would be the first time that heavy bombers would participate in close support of infantry.[32] The introduction of heavy bombers created some additional planning concerns. The heavy bombers would be flying from bases in southern Italy, Sicily, and North Africa. The heavy bombers would also be bombing from high altitude. These two facts placed a premium on good weather.

Freyberg initial request for thirty-six Kittyhawks had grown into an air armada. The most probable explanation can be traced back to a pair of messages sent by Lieutenant General Henry H. Arnold, commander of the American Army Air Force, to Eaker on 10 February 1944. In the first message, Arnold stated that "considering difficulties being encountered in Italian campaign despite our overwhelming air superiority it would appear that perhaps our organization, tactics or equipment may be faulty in certain respects."[33] In the second message, Arnold hotly states, "A serious crisis appears to be imminent in the beachhead south of Rome and for our Fifth and for the

British Eighth Army. In view of this, information is requested as to why every airplane that is flyable and has a crew is not used against German personnel, equipment and installations. Your comments desired."[34] It seems likely that Eaker took advantage of the Monte Cassino mission to help make a statement on behalf of the air corps.

During a visit to the Fifth Army Headquarters on 14 February 1944, Freyberg was informed that the time of the bombing was changed from the afternoon of the sixteenth to the morning of the fifteenth. The change was predicated on clearing weather and on Ultra intercepts that described an increased threat of a German counteroffensive against the Anzio beachhead on the 16th.[35] Freyberg notified Dimoline, the acting 4th Indian Division commander, of the change. Dimoline tried to explain the difficulties associated with positioning his forces for the assault to Freyberg. Freyberg's response was "the bombing had been put on at their [the Indian Division's] request, that if we cancelled the programme now we would never get the air again and that this delay from day to day was making us look ridiculous."[36] Freyberg gave Dimoline thirty minutes to state categorically whether or not the Indian units could withdraw beyond the bomb safety line and could attack at the conclusion of the bombing. Dimoline informed Freyberg that he could do neither.[37] Freyberg did not pass this information to anyone in his chain of command.

To exacerbate the tactical uselessness of the bombing, for some unexplained reason Brigadier O. de T. Lovett, commander of the Indian 7th Brigade tasked to assault the monastery, was unaware of the change in bombing schedule. The sound of bomber engines overhead on the 15th provided Brigadier Lovett with his notice of the change. This oversight or miscommunication is even more puzzling given that Dimoline's

situational assessment was based upon the information provided by Brigadier Lovett the previous evening.[38]

Freyberg never provided his reasoning in allowing the bombing mission to continue, but he was aware of the two critical factors that should have guided his decision to proceed or abort. Freyberg was aware that soldiers were within the bomb safety line. He was also aware that the assaulting unit was unprepared to conduct the attack in any kind of coordinated effort. Yet, he permitted the bombing mission to continue. Freyberg's conversation with Dimoline seems the most telling. Freyberg permitted the bombing to continue as an alternative to looking "ridiculous" in the eyes of the American and British leadership within the theater.

Political Necessity

Given the nature of the Italian campaign, a coalition of forces with unique perspectives on the war, it is hardly surprising that politics would enter into the decision making process at the higher end of the chain of command. The unfortunate aspect in the case of the Abbey of Monte Cassino is the inability of leaders to assert themselves to prevent a huge blunder. Alexander, Clark, and Freyberg deserve equal billing on the debt of blame. Alexander allowed himself to be influenced on a tactical decision by the impatience of Mr. Churchill. Alexander also permitted the unique status of Freyberg to cloud his judgment. Clark as the immediate commander of Freyberg could have flatly refused the mission. Instead, he passed the buck. Freyberg initiated the mission with best intentions, but when faced with the facts of its futility Freyberg preferred to allow its continuance. The apathy of the Allied leadership resulted in the death of hundreds of

civilians, in the destruction of a priceless monument to Christian ideals, and in the creation of a German strongpoint within the ruins.

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[1]Realeigh Trevelyan, *Rome '44: The Battle for the Eternal City* (New York: Viking, 1981), 78.

[2]Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 497-498.

[3]Paret, 498-499.

[4]John Ellis, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984), 5.

[5]Ibid, 3.

[6]Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations,* vol. 3, *Salerno to Cassino* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969), 4.

[7]Ibid, 5.

[8]Ibid, 15.

[9]Ellis, 12.

[10]Ibid, 13.

[11]Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 10.

[12]Ibid, 8.

[13]Mark W. Clark, *Calculated Risk,* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 254.

[14]Nigel Nicolson, *Alex: The Life of Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 226.

[15]Dominick Graham, *Cassino,* (New York: Ballantine, 1970), 16.

[16]Harold R. L. G. Alexander, *The Alexander Memoirs 1940-1945* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1962), 109.

[17]Ibid, 119.

[18]Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg, VC: Soldier of Two Nations,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 437.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid, 438.

[21]Ibid, 446.

[22]Mark W. Clark, *General Mark W. Clark Diary* vol. 6 (The Citadel Archives and Museum, Charleston), 4 Feb 1944.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Freyberg, 204.

[25]Clark, *Clark Diary*, 13 Feb 1944.

[26]David Hapgood and David Richardson, *Monte Cassino* (New York: Congdon and Weed, 1984), 165.

[27]Ibid, 172.

[28]Clark, *Clark Diary*, 13 Feb 1944.

[29]Hapgood and Richardson, 173.

[30]Ibid, 181.

[31]Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, 411.

[32]Fred Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino*, (London: Cassell, 1957), 126.

[33]Ellis, 183.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Hapgood and Richardson, 195.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ellis, 180.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

> But the phrase 'military necessity' is sometimes used where it would be more truthful to speak of military convenience or even of personal convenience. I do not want it to cloak slackness or indifference.[1]
>
> Eisenhower, *Monte Cassino*

In 1949, a British investigation into the circumstances of the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino concluded that there was no evidence of German use of the monastery at the time the bombing was approved. The results of the investigation remained classified for thirty years to suppress the embarrassing facts of the incident.[2] The United States waited until 1969 to finally confess in its official history[3] that the monastery "was actually unoccupied by German troops."[4] The delay in publicly admitting the mistakes that were made prevented the military from incorporating any lessons learned during the post war period. The lessons that could have been learned dealt with the prerequisites required to satisfy military necessity, the wisdom of targeting based upon the potential psychological and morale impact amongst friendly troops, and the complexities of leadership in a multinational army.

Military Necessity

It was foreseen that commanders in the Italian Campaign might be faced with the hard decision of destroying irreplaceable historic landmarks to save the lives of their soldiers. Eisenhower tried to establish the standard that would be used in Italy when on 29 December 1943 he sent a message to all his subordinate commanders that stated:

> If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more and the building must go. But the choice is not always so clear-cut as that. In many cases the monuments

> can be spared without any detriment to operational needs. Nothing can stand against the argument of military necessity.[5]

Allied military leaders abused the Eisenhower definition of military necessity when they allowed the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino. Eisenhower opened the door with the declaration that "Nothing can stand against the argument of military necessity."[6]

In 1928, Burleigh Cushing Rodick wrote *The Doctrine of Necessity in International Law*. In his book, Rodick discusses the two major theories of military necessity in the post-World War I period. The first theory limits the invocation of military necessity to "circumstances in which the law has in advance given an express sanction for its use."[7] The second theory is embodied in the phrase, "military expediency overrules the manner of warfare."[8] Rodick wrote that the first theory is the "only one that is legally valid."[9] and was generally accepted by the United States and Britain at the time. Germany was affiliated with the second theory which Rodick described as a "clear violation of the spirit and letter of the Hague Rules."[10] From the context of Eisenhower's message to his subordinates in December 1943, Eisenhower seems more in line with the second theory versus the first. The result was that "military necessity" became the ultimate trump card to be played by Freyberg and Alexander at Monte Cassino.

If Eisenhower's intent was to inform his subordinate commanders that the specifications of military necessity weighed equally between a village church and a historic monastery, his choice of words betrayed his intent. Eisenhower removed the check of humanity and chivalry against military necessity. With the similarities between the American and the British rules and laws that govern land warfare, Eisenhower could

have framed his guidance within existing doctrine. The reiteration of current legal doctrine along with his warning against "convenience" would have reinforced the permissive nature of military necessity within the context of the special conditions and prevented the random application of the definition at the individual level among subordinate commanders. Clearly, Tuker, Freyberg, and Alexander all had different interpretations of military necessity when applied against the Abbey of Monte Cassino. The absence of a universal understanding of military necessity prevented commanders at the various levels from applying a common litmus test to the request to bomb the monastery.

Tuker based his bombing request on the principles of military necessity. It was Tuker's reasoning that the monastery provided a distinct military advantage to the Germans regardless of whether it was occupied. Tuker assumed that if the monastery was not already occupied it would be used as a "keep by the last remnants."[11] Rodick supports the argument of bombardment of a "shelter to which the enemy might retire."[12] While Tuker may not have foreseen the value of the ruins in the establishment of a strongpoint, he did understand the magnitude of the task of reducing the monastery when he stated that "1,000 lbs bombs would be next to useless."[13] While some may debate the thought process behind his assumptions, the bombing request clearly was founded upon military necessity. Tuker's intent was to deny of German use of the monastery to facilitate the attack of his division on the objective of Monte Cassino.

As the bombing request began its ascent up the chain of command, the application of the requirements of military necessity remained the central argument, both for and against. Freyberg supported Tuker and passed the request to Fifth Army Headquarters

and Fifteenth Army Group Headquarters. Because of Freyberg's aversion to casualties rooted in his experiences of World War I and his position as New Zealand land forces commander, the bombing option seemed a rational choice for the preservation of Allied lives. Clark opposed the bombing. Clark did not have any evidence of German activity within the monastery. There were also reports that monks and civilian refugees remained in the monastery. Finally, Clark hypothesized that the ruins of the monastery would enhance the defensive value of Monte Cassino. With all this input, the request was placed in the hands of Alexander.

Alexander was faced with making a decision based upon two vastly different interpretations of the situation. From his comments, Alexander does not seem convinced that the Germans were using the monastery for military purposes. Rather than disapproving the bombing request, Alexander chose to create a new criterion for military necessity based upon the psychological value to friendly troops. It was a poorly conceived decision to be discussed in length later in the chapter.

The initial concept of the bombing which was founded upon military necessity envisioned an air bombardment in coordination with a ground assault. The bombing would "soften" the target and allow ground forces to quickly seize the objective of Monte Cassino. As the coordination between the air portion and the ground portion of the attack diverged, the issue of the relevance of the bombing should have become an issue. It was an argument that was not raised.

Freyberg knew that the benefit of the bombing within the context of his plan to seize Monte Cassino was marginal at best. Freyberg understood the intent of the request from his subordinate commander. Freyberg knew the air bombardment was not going to

be synchronized with the ground assault. He was in a position to make the call that could have diverted the aircraft. Yet, Freyberg allowed the bombing mission to be executed. The basic tenet of military necessity is the application of force to compel the submission of the enemy. The fact that the air bombardment was not synchronized with the ground assault meant that the bombing was not intended to defeat the enemy. If the bombing had been coordinated with ground assault, the requirements for military necessity, regardless of how ill-conceived they may have been, would have been satisfied. The fact that Freyberg allowed the bombing despite its irrelevance is the proximate cause of the needless destruction of the Abbey of Monte Cassino.

Psychological Necessity

The decision to approve the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino on the basis of its psychological value to friendly troops was poorly conceived. Instead of basing his decision on the effect the bombing would have on the enemy, Alexander based his decision on the effect the bombing would have on his own troops. The fallacy of his decision is two fold. First, military necessity does not provide an exception to customary law or treaty law for the needless attack of the enemy to enhance the morale and psyche of friendly forces. Second, the possible negative psychological effects were not considered. When Alexander failed to heed to legal guidelines, he opened himself up to criticism and condemnation which he was probably willing to endure. When Alexander failed to conduct comprehensive analysis of the possible effects, he opened his troops up to feelings of increased futility and frustration, the very opposite of the effect intended.

Alexander states in his memoirs that the destruction of the Abbey of Monte Cassino met the requirements of military necessity because of the “effect it would have

on the morale of the attackers."[14] Going back to the primary tenet of military necessity being the application of force to compel the submission of the enemy, attacks to maximize the psychological trauma and reduce the effectiveness of enemy soldiers seems justified. The converse of that argument, attacking to minimize the psychological trauma on friendly troops, does not seem justified. The needless destruction of men and property to minimize the psychological trauma of friendly troops falls more in line with the employment of "arms, projectiles, or material calculated to cause unnecessary suffering" and is specifically prohibited by the Hague Convention. It should be noted that the entire text of the 1907 Hague Convention in its original French and a translated copy in English were included in the British General Staff text *Land Warfare: An Exposition of the Laws and Usages of War on Land for the Guidance of Officers of His Majesty's Army.* All of the specifications that invoke military necessity have one common thread. All are actions taken to create an advantageous effect on the enemy. In all of the sources consulted, there is not a single instance of military necessity excusing actions against an enemy to enhance the morale and psyche of friendly troops.

Alexander also failed to see the possible negative effects of the bombing on the psyche of his soldiers. A comprehensive analysis of the possible outcomes would have revealed at least two options that came to fruition. The first point to be examined is the benefits and drawbacks of success or failure in the bombing raid. If the focus is the psychological value to friendly forces, what would be the psychological effect on the troops if the monastery is not completely reduced? A second point to be examined is the impact of possible fratricide. Given that it was not uncommon for strategic bombers in World War II to miss targets by as much as five miles, the close proximity of troops to

the monastery despite the limited withdrawal created an opportunity for fratricide. The units most likely to experience fratricide were the same units that would be conducting the assault. They were also the same units that Alexander intended to have the highest improvement in morale. He should have considered whether the desired improvement in morale would be offset by fratricidal casualties.

The soldiers attempting to seize Monte Cassino quickly discovered that the bombing did not change the magnitude of the mission. The 1st Royal Sussex Battalion of the 4th Indian Division suffered 174 casualties in its vain attempt to seize Point 593 the evening of 15 February and the morning of 16 February.[15] Allied soldiers had seen the entire might of the Allied military make a futile effort to remove the enemy from Monte Cassino. The soldiers were forced to sit in their stone coffin-like structures and wonder what they could do that several scores of bombers were unable to do.

The fact that the bombers also caused friendly casualties among the earmarked assault units was disheartening. Lieutenant Colonel Butler was in the 4th Indian Division area during the time of the bombing. Butler witnessed the tear streaked faces of Punjabis as they carried their long time company commander, a British officer, to aid station. He had suffered a shrapnel wound in the back. Several other Indian soldiers were also wounded during the bombing. The enraged battalion commander tried to determine why he had not been told of the change in the timing of the bombing with adequate forewarning to withdraw his soldiers to a safe distance.[16] Similar accounts are described in other battalions across the ridge. It was a scene in stark contrast to the cheering soldiers observing the event from a distance.

One of the psychological effects that Alexander envisioned with the bombing was an increase in confidence by soldiers in their commanders. Soldiers would see that their commanders were trying to establish the most favorable conditions possible. The obvious target population was the soldiers in the units that would be conducting the assault on Monte Cassino. From the descriptions of Butler, the fratricide incident and the miscommunication between echelons of commander negated any possible positive psychological effect.

Political Necessity

The great military theorist Karl von Clausewitz wrote that "war is merely the continuation of policy by other means."[17] World War II was no exception. The Italian Campaign was a direct result of Churchill's lobby at the Trident Conference. It was during the Trident conference that the military objectives of the Italian Campaign were detailed. Neither Eisenhower nor Alexander determined these objectives. The political personas of Churchill and Roosevelt approved the military objectives. As the primary advocate of the Italian Campaign, Churchill was intimately involved in all of the operational details. The consequence was constant pressure from a national leader on the Allied military commanders in Italy to succeed.

Clausewitz insightfully describes coalition warfare when he wrote:

> It would all be tidier, less of a theoretical problem, if the contingent promised--ten, twenty, or thirty thousand men--were placed entirely at the ally's disposal and he were free to use it as he wished. It would then in effect be a hired force. But that is far from what really happens. The auxiliary force usually operates under it own commander; he is dependent only on his government.[18]

While the wire diagram may have shown Freyberg as a subordinate to Clark and Alexander, Freyberg had his own charter from the New Zealand government. It was the

unique relationship of Freyberg within the Fifth Army that created a political overtone to the decision process that culminated with the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino. Clark describes his own attitudes and those shared by Alexander that a decision perceived to adversely affect the New Zealand Corps could have some major political repercussions. Freyberg hinted that a decision not to bomb the monastery might result in a political quandary when he told Gruenther "that any higher commander who refused to authorize the bombing would have to be prepared to take the responsibility for a failure of the attack."[19] Some historians incorrectly refer to this statement as being the primary influence upon Alexander's decision to bomb the monastery. According to Clark's diary, Harding had already contacted Gruenther and informed him of Alexander's decision to approve the bombing request prior to the inflammatory conversation with Freyberg. It could be argued that Freyberg informed Alexander of his position during their meeting earlier that morning, but there is no evidence to confirm it. It seems preferable to take Alexander's memoirs as the truth, but the political implications were probably a strong secondary consideration.

The strong statements of Freyberg irreversibly tied him to the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino. During the course of the delays for weather and tactical reasons, Freyberg became aware of the inability of the 4th Indian Division to execute a coordinated assault with the air bombardment. When Dimoline tried to explain the difficulties of getting into position to conduct the assault, Freyberg states "that this delay from day to day was making us look ridiculous."[20] This statement shows that Freyberg felt a connection between the successful execution of the bombing and his unit and, by extension, his nation. It was this unbreakable connection that caused Freyberg to sit idly

by as Allied bombers attempted to reduce the Abbey of Monte Cassino to pebbles and dust. To divert the bombers after the outlay of the political collateral would make Freyberg and the New Zealand Corps "look ridiculous."

Leadership Failure

Freyberg was clearly the proximate cause of the irrelevant bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino. Even though the American II Corps culminated with a similar plan, he chose to continue the frontal attack against Monte Cassino. He failed to accurately determine the disposition of German forces on Monte Cassino. He allowed a subordinate commander to focus the full might of the Allied military on the only place on Monte Cassino devoid of Germans. He used his unique political position within the military framework to influence his superiors. Finally, realizing that the bombing would not achieve the desired results, Freyberg allowed the bombing to continue to avoid sacrificing unit and national prestige. Clark and Alexander also deserve a portion of the blame. Clark knew that the bombing was a mistake. Instead of making a decision based on the tactical situation and military necessity, he succumbed to the political pressures of command in a coalition army. Alexander turned a deaf ear to military necessity. He chose to try and give the Allied soldiers a cheap psychological boost. It was a poorly conceived argument that backfired.

In the end, the Germans defeated all direct assaults on the Monte Cassino complex. The Allies ultimately employed the bulk of the entire 15th Army Group during Operation Diadem to turn the German position at Monte Cassino. With American and French forces threatening to envelop German positions on Monte Cassino, German forces voluntarily withdrew from the rugged terrain of Monte Cassino in May 1944. On 18 May

1944, the Polish 2d Corps attached to the British 8th Army finally occupied the monastery. With the penetration of the Gustav Line in the Liri Valley, the Allies were able to conduct a general advance on Rome. On 5 June 1944, Allied forces entered Rome. The aura of victory for forces in the Italian Campaign was short lived as attention turned to the Normandy landings on the following day.

If the objectives of the Italian Campaign truly were the capitulation of the Italian government and the fixing of a maximum number of German forces, a question for further research was the necessity for large scale operations after the Italian surrender and the seizure of the airfields at Foggia. The preparation for an offensive in coordination with the Normandy landings would have achieved the same effect without the necessity of the Anzio landing or the Cassino winter offensive. It is hard to quantify the value of the Italian Campaign, but the costs can be counted in the lives lost in the "soft underbelly of Europe."

Implications for Today

Today, a visitor to Cassino can visit the rebuilt Benedictine monastery on Monte Cassino. The bricks and mortar that gave way under the weight of Allied bombs in 1944 have been replaced, and the monastery has been restored to its former greatness. From the valley below, the bright white walls do not reveal the terrible ordeal suffered by so many. Not to avail ourselves of the lessons that can be learned from its destruction in 1944 would dishonor the soldiers that fought and died here. It would also dishonor the monks and civilians killed on that fateful day in February 1944. The three primary lessons to be learned are to conduct a thorough analysis of any course of action, to ignore

national identity and employ multinational forces based upon capability, and to clearly delineate the rules of engagement.

The failure to conduct a thorough analysis on a course of action proved problematic on two separate occasions during the early weeks of February 1944. The first occasion was the attacks to divert German attention from the Anzio landing. Unless the Anzio landing was a complete success, the American Fifth Army would have to conduct a winter offensive to conduct a penetration of the Gustav Line and relieve the American VI Corps. The possibility of a penetration became unrealistic given that the diversionary attacks to cover the initial Anzio landings precipitated the German reinforcement of units along the Gustav Line. The second occasion was Freyberg's decision to continue the frontal attack on Monte Cassino that failed to recognize the mistakes made by the American II Corps and failed to use the operations of forces on his flank to his advantage.

The attacks conducted by the British X Corps and American II Corps were intended to draw forces south to facilitate the landing of the American VI Corps at Anzio. The attacks achieved their operational objective and the Germans moved their two reserve divisions south to oppose British X Corps. With the objective already met, Clark still permitted the American 36th Division to attempt their river crossing assault of the Rapido River. With over 1600 casualties, the American 36th Division would be haunted by the operation and be only marginally combat effective for the balance of the Cassino battles. While the Anzio landing did face very light resistance, it was not a complete success. Clark was now forced to penetrate the Gustav Line to relieve the pressure on the VI Corps which was quickly encircled by German forces. This new winter campaign

would have to be conducted along the same portions of the Gustav Line that the Germans had just reinforced because of Clark's piecemeal attack along the length of his front. In essence, the diversionary attacks had facilitated the reinforcement of German units that would now face the Fifth Army main effort with the time critical task of relieving embattled VI Corps. It was an operational mistake that would not be overcome until Operation Diadem in May 1944.

Churchill asked Freyberg during the summer of 1944 why he had chosen to attack the German defenses at Cassino at their strongest point. Freyberg replied, "because there was no alternative."[21] This statement is slightly disingenuous. Freyberg had originally drafted a plan that acted in cooperation with the French Expeditionary Corps on his right flank. The intent was to bypass Cassino and the heights above by maneuvering through the mountains and entering the Liri Valley further north. Freyberg would later change the plan to a frontal assault of Monte Cassino that was unsuccessfully tried by American II Corps.[22] The frontal attack on the Cassino complex did not take advantage of the French forces on his flanks. The plan would succeed or fail based upon battalions operating along narrow avenues of approach against heavily fortified German positions. If Freyberg had taken the time to walk the terrain that his troops would have to assault across, he may have had a better understanding of the complexities of the terrain. The lack of thorough analysis doomed his troops to failure.

Churchill sent a cable to Alexander that made a point about command in a multinational army:

> I have a feeling that you may have hesitated to assert your authority because you were dealing so largely with Americans and therefore urged an advance instead of ordering it. You are quite entitled to give them orders, and I have it from the

> highest American authorities that it is their wish that their troops should receive direct orders. They say their Army has been framed more on Prussian lines than on the more smooth British lines, and that American commanders expect to receive positive orders, which they will immediately obey. Do not hesitate therefore to give orders just as you would to our own men.[23]

Churchill's guidance was sound. As soon as a commander starts to base his decision on possible political implications, something is wrong. A commander should be given a mission and the assets to accomplish the mission. If the mission is properly nested within the national political objectives, any political concerns should have already been discerned. The commander should remain focused on the tactical and operational requirements to accomplish the mission. The introduction of foreign soldiers does not change the focus or the requirements. The commander is duty bound to select the right unit to act at the right place at the right time based upon the level of proficiency and capabilities of a unit regardless of nationality. If the willingness of the foreign unit to accept orders is in doubt, the situation was must be resolved to the commander's satisfaction before commitment. Otherwise, a scenario might arise in which a commander is unable to accomplish his assigned mission because he is only willing to commit the portion of his force that inspires his confidence.

Allied commanders did not have a universal definition of military necessity. As Rodick observed in this book, the only legal binding method of utilizing military necessity is to clearly identify the exceptions to customary and treaty law that would permit action. Today, comprehensive and coherent rules of engagement would help mitigate circumstances like those experienced by the commanders at Cassino. The propaganda coup that the bombing gave the German would pale in comparison to the news coverage offered by CNN. Legal subject matter experts need to provide

commanders with timely guidance on the status of protected targets that may be at issue. It should not be a matter of interpretation. Before any action is taken, three fundamental questions must be addressed. Does the action cause harm to civilians or civilian objects that are excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated? Does the action violate any international laws? And is the action intended towards the military defeat of the enemy? All three of these questions are elements within the current definition of military necessity in the United States. The answer must be a definitive "No" to all three fundamental questions. Any other response indicates that the action does not meet the burden of military necessity. If the burden is not met, it is against the letter and spirit of the regulation and international law to try and redefine military necessity to meet a particular scenario.

The battle for Monte Cassino was a desperate struggle under extreme conditions between two well trained and dedicated armies. The reason for the battle and the tactics employed by the commanders are open to criticism and debate. An unfortunate aspect was the needless death of the monks and civilians that had taken refuge in the Abbey of Monte Cassino. The wanton destruction of this historic building embodied the evil and indifference of war. While the isolated act of bombing the monastery is deplorable, the men cowering in their stone coffins along the exposed ridge in the snow and rain are owed a debt beyond the fiscal means of any nation.

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[1]David Hapgood and David Richardson, *Monte Cassino* (New York: Congdon and Weed, 1984), 158.

[2]Ibid, 237.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, vol. 3, *Salerno to Cassino* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969), 407.

[5]Hapgood and Richardson, 158.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Burleigh Cushing Rodick, *The Doctrine of Necessity in International Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), 59.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid, 60.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Laurie Barber and John Tonkin-Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salmander* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 207.

[12]Burleigh Cushing Rodick, *The Doctrine of Necessity in International Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), 63.

[13]Barber and Tonkin-Covell, 207.

[14]Harold R. L. G. Alexander, *The Alexander Memoirs 1940-1945* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1962), 121.

[15]John Ellis, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory*, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984), 185-186.

[16]Arthur L. Kelly, *BattleFire! Combat Stories from World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press, 1997), 76.

[17]Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 87.

[18]Ibid, 603.

[19]Mark W. Clark, *General Mark W. Clark Diary* Volume 6 (The Citadel Archives and Museum, Charleston), February 1944.

[20]Hapgood and Richardson, 195.

[21]Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg, VC: Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 459.

[22]Hapgood and Richardson, 152.

[23]Fred Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino* (London: Cassell, 1957), 72.

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