

597 DAYS: A DIVISION'S MORALE DURING SUSTAINED COMBAT

A Monograph

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ABSTRACT

597 DAYS: A DIVISION'S MORALE DURING SUSTAINED COMBAT, by MAJOR Jacob C. Helgestad, Minnesota Army National Guard, 47 pages.

The soldiers of the 34th Infantry (Red Bull) Division conducted 597 days of combat operations in the Italian theater during the Second World War. The decisions made by operational planners allowed the men to continue the fight beyond the recognized point of when combat exhaustion affects soldiers. Operational planners' arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose achieved not only operational and strategic end states, but ensured the 34th Infantry Division's relief from the front line at the point just prior to the division becoming combat exhausted.

The key to the 34th Infantry Division's success came from the development of group cohesion and strong leadership. Combat exhaustion still affected the soldiers individually; however, the group provided the individual soldier the strength and the ability to achieve more than their recognized limits. The fear of letting down the group provided the strength for individuals, ensuring operational success for the organization. During refit periods, the division's leaders helped to reinforce and strengthen the bond of the group by ensuring veterans passed their knowledge to replacements in a training environment. During combat operations, the actions and decisions by leaders inspired their men to continue the fight beyond their recognized limits.

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INTRODUCTION

During the Second World War, the Allied Italian campaign relieved pressure on the Soviet Union's Eastern front through the creation of a front in Western Europe. The campaign was also a diversion to the planned Allied invasion across the English Channel. Overall, the campaign cost the United States Fifth Army 188,746 casualties from a front never meant to liberate Europe.¹ On the "Forgotten Front of Italy," troops prepared to conduct an offensive on some of the worst terrain fought upon in World War II.² In spite of all this, the soldiers of the United States Fifth Army continued their fight up the boot of Italy, with one unit in particular, the 34th (Red Bull) Infantry Division, participating in every major battle in the campaign.

The first soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division came ashore on September 9, 1943 at Salerno, Italy. Eventually, elements of the 135th Infantry Regiment reached the Swiss border by May 2, 1945. For their actions the 34th Infantry Division suffered 21,362 battle casualties, the highest of any division in the theater when daily per capita fighting strengths are considered.³ The terrain and natural elements had as significant an influence on the soldiers as did the Germans the 34th Infantry Division fought and being the longest serving division in theater only increased the stress on the soldiers.⁴ Somehow, through this all, the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division continued to push forward against a determined enemy. This monograph will specifically look at the time when the first Red Bull came ashore at Salerno through May 1945 and the German surrender.

¹ Chester Starr, ed., *From Salerno to the Alps: A History of the Fifth Army 1943-1945* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), 451.

² Homer R. Ankrum, *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears in World War II* (Lake Mills, IA: Graphic Publishing Company, 1987), 629.

³ *Ibid.*, 640.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 527.

Looking at the 34th Infantry Division's time and losses in theater presents the question of maintaining soldier morale in order to allow divisional combat operations to continue. How did the soldiers continue? What motivated them to continue moving forward against the Germans? Operationally, the question of how did the soldier's morale impact the division, corps, and army planners arises. Did the operational planners make decisions that allowed the soldiers to continue the fight? Was the operational object of the Italian campaign such that morale did not matter for the planners, as they simply needed to defeat the Germans at any cost? As John Baynes stated in his study of morale, "The least we can do is examine the actions of our own forbears with generosity and attempt to see clearly all the influences which affected them."⁵

Understanding how the 34th Infantry Division continued the fight in Italy is a study of morale and operational planning. It is the relationship between morale and operational planning this monograph will attempt to understand and explain. This monograph will analyze the 34th Infantry Division during their World War II combat operations in Italy, to determine the effects soldier morale had on operational planning at the Corps and Army levels of command.

Literature Review

There is significant historical literature covering soldier morale, as well as writings on the operations conducted in Italy. In this monograph, it is broken down into two groups. The first covers theory of morale, why soldiers fight, morale of soldiers in war, and finally combat's effects on morale. The second looks at the operations themselves. There does however exist a gap in the analysis of these two groups and the impact morale has on operational art and planning. Many external influencers affect the morale of soldiers. The different contextual framework of a review and analysis of morale and operations does not allow for a proper study of both together.

⁵ John Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage* (New York: Avery Publishing Group, 1988), 14.

The view of morale is from an individual standpoint, with the pieces making the whole. In other words, unit morale is a composite of soldier morale. The context of operations does not usually enter into the study of the cause and effect relationship between morale and soldiers. However, not including morale, or understanding its impact in operational planning, and focusing solely on “material factors” in an analysis will “condemn” anyone in their analysis of morale and operations.⁶

Operational planning is more than simply planning campaigns with icons on a computer or map. It is the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose through soldiers’ actions, whose morale plays a significant part in the execution of operations planned.⁷

Understanding the symbiotic relationship between morale and operational art to understand how decisions made by operational planners affect not only the outcome of campaigns, but also soldier morale, is of vital importance for operational artists. The determination of what units will participate in an operation, or more specifically what mission they may be given, needs to be a factor during the planning process. Simply making tactical arrangements on a map without the consideration of unit morale will affect a unit’s operational success, and the entire operation. Operational planners need to make decisions that allow a unit the ability to continue fighting. Morale and operational planning are intertwined and the study of one needs to also understand the other. Current literature fails to link the two together in a broader study of the symbiotic relationship and the overall impact on units from this relationship.

The answer to why men fight in wars is as diverse as the theories of morale, varying as much too. Why men fought during World War II is no easier to answer, even though it was a war

⁶ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 216.

⁷ Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, October 2011), 4-1.

against an easily demonized enemy. Writings on this matter vary considerably, but can be broken down into two categories. First, why men wished to fight in the war and secondly why they fought once in combat.

First, there is a rather simple reason why men fought during the Second World War, because it was the law. However, to a lesser degree there are two schools of thought why men fought which go beyond the legal requirement. On 16 September 1940, the United States established the draft law, eventually inducting ten million men into military service out of a total military force of over sixteen million.⁸ Although, simplistic in its nature, a legal draft did in fact require all men to register to fight in the war. Through various screening criteria, only men of able body and mind actually went to fight, nevertheless it was required of men to go through the process.

As previously stated, conscription was law during the war. Although it provides an analytical answer to why men fight during a time of war, it is not as simplistic as it appears. The establishment of local draft boards allowed for the processing of military age men as defined by the draft. On 16 October 1940, over sixteen million men between the ages of twenty-one to thirty-six showed up at their local draft boards to register. President Roosevelt proclaimed it was a demonstration of “the singleness of our will and the unity of the nation.”⁹ In a poll conducted in July 1940 by *LIFE*, over 70% of people polled favored the adoption of military training for all young men.¹⁰ However, the varying interpretation of draft rules by local boards allowed for the exemption of many men from service. Eventually over fifty million men from 18-45 registered

⁸ George Q. Flynn, *Conscription and Democracy: France, Great Britain and the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2001), 59-60.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁰ “What the U.S.A. Thinks,” *LIFE*, July 29, 1940, 20, under Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=xz8EAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA20&pg=PA20#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed September 17, 2013).

for the draft, with approximately ten million inducted into service.¹¹

Even though the United States had yet to enter the Second World War, nearly one third of the American population of 132 million registered.¹² There exists a consensus the US soldier during the Second World War did not fight for any grand cause, but it was simply work which needed to be completed. Their lack of willingness to articulate wartime experiences, or specifically state why they fought, lends to conclusions as numerous as the people who have written on the subject. However, the reluctance of this generation of soldiers to openly articulate why they fought does not mean they did not subconsciously understand there existed a battle between right and wrong. As children of the First World War, many of their father's had fought for democracy and now they too knew right must prevail over the evils that had arisen.¹³

The argument of why a man fought in the Second World War is a discussion with no agreed upon conclusion. Narrowing it to the men of the 34th Infantry Division adds no additional clarity either. Thousands of men served with the 34th during their time in Italy and acknowledged the need to fight the enemy. Captain Benjamin Butler of A Company, First Battalion, 168th Regiment, a farm boy from Milton, Kentucky “knew the war was necessary and would fight the Nazis to the end.”¹⁴ General John Vessey, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a veteran of the 34th Infantry Division in Italy, stated, “the whole world was at war and after Pearl Harbor, we, the USA, were clearly involved.”¹⁵ Dismissing the argument and stating these men

¹¹ Flynn, *Conscription and Democracy: France, Great Britain and the United States*, 100.

¹² United States Department of Commerce, “The 1940 Census,” United States Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/fast_facts/1940_fast_facts.html (accessed September 19, 2013).

¹³ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 473.

¹⁴ Colonel Arthur Kelly, *Battlefire! Combat Stories of World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 52, 77.

¹⁵ General John Vessey (ret), interview by author via email and US Postal Service, October 25, 2013, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

joined the military for no specific reason is simplistic in nature and countered if even by a few soldiers.

To a lesser degree, there are two other schools of thought on why men fought during the Second World War. The first school of thought believes men were fighting for a grand cause against an evil enemy. A recognizable world-changing event was occurring and men wanted to be part of it.¹⁶ The war may have never come to American shores, but it did directly affect Americans. Men wanted to be part of something larger than themselves and realized this war was a defining moment in their lives and history too. The second school of thought is men were fighting simply to end the war as quickly as possible. Men realized it was a defining moment but fought because it simply was something they had to do. This group had no specific agenda and considered fighting “something that had to be done from time to time.”¹⁷ There is no right or wrong answer.

It is difficult to clearly articulate why men fought when dealing with millions of men from various backgrounds. Again, narrowing it to the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division does not provide any additional clarity. The division started the war composed of young men predominately from Midwestern state, particularly Iowa and Minnesota, however by the end of the fighting in Italy the division was a composite of men from across the country.

Second, why men fought once in battle is unique to each soldier, but easier to identify a specific source. Overwhelmingly, group solidarity and a passage into manhood arose as the source of why, and how, men continue the fight in battle. The fear of letting a buddy, or family, down was a strong enough motivating factor to drive soldiers forward in battle. Proving manhood

¹⁶ Thomas A. Bruscino, “The Analogue of Work: Memory and Motivation for Second World War US Soldiers,” *War & Society* 28 (October 2009): 102.

¹⁷ David Hackett Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 370.

to comrades also proved a strong drive for soldiers in battle. Through living the code of a combat soldier, a man proved his manhood.¹⁸

Group cohesion provides for a primary component of unit combat effectiveness, but the development of group cohesion is a study of social science. Overall, an organization's structure creates the soldiers' immediate group, representing the number of men directly influencing a soldier's life. The development of the group and their ability to blend provides the foundation of group cohesion.¹⁹ The group often replaces an individual's family and becomes the source of social support and psychological strength to endure through combat.²⁰ The ability of a group to create cohesiveness is something that requires work and effort as it does not come automatically. The Army aids in the development of group cohesion through the coercive institutional authority in forcing groups to live, work, and fight together.²¹

It is within this forced living arrangement that the development of group behaviors occurs, eventually allowing for individuals and the group as a whole to succeed. The group internalizes the institutional establishment of discipline standards.²² In turn, the group establishes and enforces standards of behavior which "support and sustain" the individual through stresses he himself would not have had the ability to persevere through.²³ This strength comes from the knowledge that soldier's comrades are close by supporting him, as a group's unity provides "battle morale" during combat. The closeness of a comrade, and loyalty to the unit, allow soldiers

¹⁸ Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 134.

¹⁹ John A. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1948), 35.

²⁰ David H. Marlowe, *Psychological and Psychosocial Consequences of Combat and Deployment* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 11; Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 30.

²¹ Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath*, 107.

²² Picq, *Battle Studies*, 110.

²³ Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath*, 130.

to fight for somebody, rather than against somebody.²⁴

Leader actions were the second factor affecting the morale of the 34th Infantry Division soldiers during combat. The requirements placed upon a leader in combat are immense. He must love and be bonded to his men, gaining their trust and acceptance into the group. However, the leader must also understand and be willing to order his men to their deaths. A strong leader's presence is also paramount to ensure his soldier's continue the fight during combat.²⁵ The importance of a leader during group cohesion development is vital. The combination of strong tactical skills with the ability to understand and care for soldiers' needs assists the leader in group acceptance. The respect gained from soldiers creates a symbiotic relationship, where the soldiers come to understand their life will not be wasted in battle.²⁶ Officers serving during the Second World War who believed "officers who are not concerned with the welfare of their men seldom or never are successful combat officers" support the theory. The sharing of hardships with leaders' soldiers, not asking the soldiers to do anything the leader himself would not do, allows the leader to gain the group's trust and eventually acceptance. World War II soldiers overwhelmingly wanted their leaders to "get up there when the going is tough," "lead the company at the front and really stay where they could see you not hide," and "be as close to the men as possible."²⁷

Although medical conditions and sustained combat played a dramatic role in affecting soldier morale, operational art and the arrangement of tactical actions significantly influenced soldiers' morale. Soldiers do not like sitting and prefer to be moving forward toward an

²⁴ Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The problem of Battle Command*, 138; Marlowe, *Psychological and Psychosocial Consequences of Combat and Deployment*, 51; Vessey (ret), interview.

²⁵ Dave Grossman, *On Killing* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 90, 143.

²⁶ Marlowe, *Psychological and Psychosocial Consequences of Combat and Deployment*, 12.

²⁷ United States Army Services, "What the Soldier Thinks" (March 1944), 9, (July 1944), 2.

identifiable objective. When fighting was along a static line, troops looked for a way out of it.²⁸ To counter this issue, operational planners look for objectives that when achieved, increase unit morale. An example is the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division walking torturous miles creating blisters, but somehow morale rose as soldiers began talking the seizure of Rome and the thrill associated of being part of such an event.²⁹ The capture of Rome came after nine months of intense combat, but illustrates how a deliberate operational decision improved morale.

Continuous combat operations, regardless of the group cohesion level or leadership ability, will eventually affect the individual soldier and units as a whole. During the initial stages of the draft, the Army looked to World War I psychological studies in order to establish psychological screening criteria. The initial disqualification of nearly 1,600,000 from military service occurred because of emotional, mental, or educational disorders or deficiencies. However, the army eventually denied the efficiency of psychological screening, as officials determined that “every man has his breaking point.” The predisposition to a man’s breaking point was not internal to each soldier, but identified as external influencers and environmental conditions. Factors such as not knowing where the enemy was as he conducted combat operations, constant shelling, and primitive living conditions coupled with environmental conditions added to a man’s breaking point.³⁰

The medical community and the US Army conducted numerous studies and wrote extensively on combat exhaustion. The two groups attempted to explain what combat exhaustion was and how it affected the soldier. The discussion of medical conditions explained the process a soldier proceeded through as he transformed into an exhaustion casualty, as well as differing dates of when a soldier is no longer combat effective. Although the groups discuss what combat

²⁸ The General Board, *Combat Exhaustion* (United States Forces, European Theater, 1945), 5.

²⁹ Ankrum, *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears in World War II*, 526.

³⁰ Marlowe, *Psychological and Psychosocial Consequences of Combat and Deployment*, 47-53.

exhaustion meant for an individual, tying it into the fighting effectiveness of the soldiers unit is missing.

The Army defined combat exhaustion as:

The disorganization of the cohesive forces constituting the normal individual, produced by the stress of war, and resulting in an ineffective combat soldier. The incidence and severity of the condition are influenced by the social and psychological background of the individual, and his military training and experiences, combined with the effects of fatigue, hunger, fear and environment.³¹

The Army's definition places the burden of responsibility on the individual and simply describes him as an ineffective soldier. The Army concluded a veteran on the front line would greatly increase his chances of becoming a combat exhaustion casualty after four months of combat.³² A part of the preventive message prescribed by the Army was a solid unit spirit, or esprit-de-corps, and relief from the front line. The Army goes on to state the relief from the front should not be very long, with the soldier and his unit dumped back into military training mode rather quickly. The Army's approach to the problem is very analytical and structured. However, it is a generalized statement to a particular problem and in marked contrast to the medical community.

For psychological reasons, the Army created their definition of combat exhaustion to convince soldiers rest would cure their mind and body.³³ The medical community took the stance that combat exhaustion was an accumulative effect on the human body through sustained combat operations. The condition required medical attention which rest alone could not cure. Individual tolerances for stress vary the effects of combat exhaustion on a soldier, and no agreement exists within the medical community on when combat exhaustion will affect a soldier. Dates ranged from as little as fifteen to twenty to upwards of 180 days. A study conducted by Roy Swank and W.E. Marchard does however add a degree of certainty to the argument of combat exhaustion.

³¹ The General Board, *Combat Exhaustion* (United States Forces, European Theater, 1945), 1.

³² The General Board, *Combat Exhaustion*, 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1.

They believed continuous subjection to combat for a long enough period will eventually cause some form of neurotic reaction in all infantry soldiers.³⁴ The 34th Infantry Division was in Italy over twenty months, with the capture of Rome coming nine months after the entrance into the Italian campaign. Based upon the Army and medical descriptions of combat exhaustion, the division should have been combat ineffective, and this takes into account the division's removal from fight line fighting for rest and refit.

Reviews of combat exhaustion and the point at which a soldier succumbs to exhaustion through sustained combat varies considerably. The army broke combat exhaustion into two groups: new replacements and veterans. For new replacements the symptoms of combat exhaustion appeared prior to combat or within the first five days of combat. The training a replacement received had a significant impact on whether a new recruit pushed through the initial effects of combat to fall into the veteran group. The manifestation of symptoms for veterans generally occurred around the 120th day of combat, but again varied with each soldier. A soldier's ability to handle the stress of combat will influence when he becomes a combat exhaustion casualty, as will the type of combat. Civilian studies and reports state the ninetieth day of combat a soldier will achieve his peak proficiency, but decline thereafter. Other reports outline a ladder approach to combat exhaustion symptom's, the first appearing around twenty-five to thirty days of combat, but in as little as fifteen days or as great as fifty days.³⁵ The inability to determine the date an individual will succumb to combat exhaustion compounds the dilemma operational planners' face on when to pull units. A single soldier will not affect a unit's combat effectiveness, but collectively a unit will become combat ineffective from staying on the front line for too long a

³⁴ Roy L. Swank and W.E. Marchard, "Combat Neuroses: Development of Combat Exhaustion," *Archives of Neurology and Psychology* 55 (1946): 243.

³⁵ The General Board, *Combat Exhaustion*, 1-2, Swank and Marchard, "Combat Neuroses: Development of Combat Exhaustion," 243; Roy L. Swank, "Combat Exhaustion," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 109, no. 6 (June 1949): 478.

period.

The ability to know when to pull a unit from the front line, allowing them time to rest and refit for future operations, is a requirement of leaders and their planners. The army described good leadership, unit esprit-de-corps, and discipline as contributing factors in the prevention of combat exhaustion.³⁶ The time away from the line should however not be too long, in order to prevent soldiers from developing a sense of self-pity. Time provided not only allowed a soldier to rest, but it also bonded the soldier with their leaders, as the leaders showed genuine concern for soldier welfare. However, after sufficient time to relax and rest, a unit should begin a military training program.³⁷ In a recursive manner, the training program prepared a unit for future combat, but it also lays the framework for preventing future combat exhaustion.

Literature of Italian campaign focuses primarily upon narratives of the battles themselves. However, there is discontent over what exactly was the purpose of the Italian campaign. What were the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space and purpose meant to accomplish? The strategy itself seemed designed not to win but to endure, with J.F.C. Fuller going so far as to call Italy, “Tactically the most absurd and strategically the most senseless campaign of the whole war.”³⁸ Reviews address the broad operational approach of Fifth Army, but fail to answer why Fifth Army chose specific operational objectives over others. If the strategy in Italy was to endure, the selection of tactical engagements followed an operational approach to tie down as many German divisions as possible.³⁹

Initially, the Germans did not intend to defend Italy south of Rome, mitigating the Allied

³⁶ The General Board, *Combat Exhaustion*, 5-6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸ Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 583.

³⁹ Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1969), 8; Martin Blumenson *Mark Clark: The Last of the Great World War II Commanders* (New York: Congdon & Weed, 1984), 126; Gregory Blaxland, *Alexander's Generals: The Italian Campaign, 1944-1945* (London: William Kimber & CO. Limited, 1979), 14.

strategy to force the Germans to deploy additional divisions for the defense of Italy. Hitler ordered General Rommel to activate a skeleton army group eventually consisting of sixteen divisions to defend Italy from Rome in the south to the Alps in northern Italy. However, the evacuation from Sicily of German forces into southern Italy brought German troop strength in the south to over 135,000 arrayed in three Corps and eight divisions.⁴⁰ The allied strategy did not force the Germans to draw forces away from the Russian front, as the allies simply fought forces already arrayed in Italy in addition to the evacuees. By January 1944, the Germans still had fourteen divisions on the front lines from the Winter Line to Rome, with seven more divisions in northern Italy. The number of divisions does become suspect because the Germans reorganized their divisions, reducing the number of battalions and regiments.⁴¹ It is difficult to state the allied strategy achieved success. However, to maintain the pressure on the Germans, regardless of the manpower cost, Fifth Army continued their drive north. The first major objective became Rome and whoever held the capital won the battle for southern Italy.⁴² The battle for northern Italy then began at the capture of Rome as Fifth Army continued its pursuit of the German forces north to the Alps.

Methodology

The original hypothesis was that morale of the 34th Infantry Division soldiers was not a contributing factor to the operational planning of its higher headquarters during the division's sustained combat operations in Italy. However, the hypothesis was disproved during analysis of the 34th Infantry Division's battles and their time spent during rest and refit periods. The development of a strong group cohesion and leadership, as well as the operational decisions made

⁴⁰ Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 60-63.

⁴¹ Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 67; Blaxland, *Alexander's Generals: The Italian Campaign, 1944-1945*, 28-29.

⁴² Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 257.

by planners allowed the 34th Infantry Division to conduct sustained combat operations in the Italian theater during the Second World War. The monograph presents five sections arranged chronologically by the battle streamers won by the 34th Infantry Division in Italy during the Second World War. The first section will focus upon the division coming ashore and their first four months in Italy from September 1943 to December 1943. The first Divisional unit, 151st Field Artillery Battalion, landed at Salerno on September 9, 1943.⁴³ However, the majority of the division did not come ashore until September 29, 1943. During these four months, the division learned what it meant to fight on Italian terrain, crossing the Volturno River three times as well as fighting the battle of Mount Pantano. An analysis of combat exhaustion literature and the division's first four months of fighting will be conducted, to determine if operational planners relieved the division from the front line after an appropriate amount of time. Also reviewed, is whether the division had enough time to rest and refit before beginning the offensive to capture Cassino.

The second section will focus on the division's fight through the winter of 1944, crossing of the Rapido River and culminating with the battle of Cassino. The section will look at the conditions the soldiers had to fight through, and the impact on their morale. Additionally, they fought a determined enemy who took full advantage provided by the terrain. The Germans dictated how the battle proceeded; inflicting horrific casualties on the infantry regiments, but the soldiers continued the fight. The section will review how soldiers countered the conditions, in turn cementing their group solidarity.

The third section will focus on the division's relief from Cassino and their redeployment to the Anzio beachhead and subsequent push to Rome. The fighting was difficult, but at the end of it was Rome, the center of Western Civilization for thousands of years. Historians believe

⁴³ *The Story of the 34th Infantry Division: Book I Louisiana to Pisa*, Information and Education Section, MTOUSA, <http://www.34infdiv.org/history/34div/1.9.html> (accessed October 11, 2013).

Lieutenant General Mark Clark was chasing personal glory through seizing Rome instead of cutting off the retreating Germans. However, his operational decision potentially allowed the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division to continue their long, hard fight. The decision is analyzed in an attempt to determine why General Clark went to Rome.

The fourth section will focus upon the North Apennines and fighting at the Gothic Line. With the fall of Rome, the Germans did not surrender but continued to fight a delaying action against the division as the Germans retreated north and the division followed. This period ended with the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division fighting against the German's last line of defense in Italy, the Gothic Line. The final section will focus on the division's last major battle of the Second World War at the Po Valley. It will focus on the effects twenty months of intense combat had on soldiers and the organization, and additionally how soldiers felt upon the conclusion of the war.

THE 34TH INFANTRY DIVISION IN ITALY: OCTOBER 1943 – MAY 1945

During their sustained combat operations in Italy, one factor continually influenced the morale and operational planning of the 34th Infantry Division: geography. Geography dominated operational decisions at every echelon during the Italian Campaign. As a peninsula, Italy is approximately a thousand miles long, a hundred miles wide, and the Apennines mountain range, which runs the length of the peninsula, nearly splits the country in half. The distance from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the western edge of the Apennines varies between twenty to twenty-five miles wide and represents the small operational corridor of the United States Fifth Army. Branching out from the main mountain range are smaller succession ranges that at times run parallel from the main range all the way to coast. Scattered throughout these mountains are rivers, which wind their way through mountain passes, creating natural obstacles to operations. Finally, there are few

roads to navigate through Mother Nature's operational obstacles, requiring soldiers to walk over or around mountains and through rivers.⁴⁴ Italian terrain is better suited for the defense; a point the German's took full advantage of making the 34th Infantry Division fight for every yard. It was within this inhospitable terrain, against a determined enemy, that operational planners decided which objectives to seize. They had to balance strategic and operational end states against soldiers will, and ability, to continue the fight.

Coming out of the First World War, the American operating concept could very well have been coined the "Steam Roller." Distant objectives were given to units, who were held to the task until they were either unfit to fight or the objective had been seized.⁴⁵ Maintaining the initiative maintained the morale of soldiers. In spite of approaching combat exhaustion through continuous offensive actions, soldiers preferred to continue moving forward rather than sitting in the static line.⁴⁶ The 1923 United States Army Field Service Regulation stated, "The ultimate objective of all military operations is the destruction of the enemy's armed forces in battle."⁴⁷ Doctrine coupled with the "Steam Roller" best describes the fighting in Italy for the 34th Infantry Division. As a disciple of General Marshall and a graduate of the army education system, General Clark would bring doctrine and the "Steam Roller" to Italy.⁴⁸

Morale

The theory of morale is as much a study of psychology of man as it is a study of military

⁴⁴ Fred Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino*, 29; Starr, ed., *From Salerno to the Alps: A History of the Fifth Army 1943-1945*, 447; *United States Fifth Army, Fifth Army History Part II: Across the Volturno to the Winter Line* (Florence, Italy: L'Impronta Press, 1944), 4.

⁴⁵ George C. Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War; 1917-1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 179.

⁴⁶ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War; 1917-1918*, 179; *The General Board, Combat Exhaustion*, 5.

⁴⁷ Robert M. Citino, *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 76.

⁴⁸ Blumenson, Mark Clark: *The Last of the Great World War II Commanders*, 40.

history and man's actions during war. It is also a topic of writing dating back over 2,500 years. In *The Art of War* Sun Tzu wrote, "You should attend to the nourishment of your troops to not let them get worn down; lift their morale and build up their strength."⁴⁹ Another writing on the theory of morale came from the French Colonel Ardant du Picq in his book *Battle Studies*. Colonel du Picq's main argument is man is the fundamental instrument in battle and the human heart is the point from which all matters pertaining to war must originate.⁵⁰ The theory that the human heart is the starting point for matters pertaining to war, established the idea that training allows a man to understand the realities of warfare.

It is along this line of thinking that S.L.A. Marshall believed man does not get what he most requires – the simple details of common human experience on the field of battle. The argument exists that specific training can provide the necessary tools for infantry soldiers to succeed in battle, but ultimately it is the touch of human nature, which gives men courage.⁵¹ These three distinct theories separated by thousands of years help to illustrate the divergence of thought on soldier morale. There is no one theory that stands above the rest. All writings on the matter are reflective of the writer's own experiences on how actions affect morale. The differences between wars, cultural effects, and time make it an impossible feat to clearly define and create an all-encompassing theory of morale. However, taken as a broad field of study one can formulate a personal theory of morale of which to apply in studies.

Theories of morale historically focus upon the individual soldier, not organizations as a whole. The composite strength of an enemy's will allows an army to understand their enemy's

⁴⁹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, ed. Robert G. Henricks, trans. Roger T. Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 157.

⁵⁰ Ardant du Picq, *Battle Studies* (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing, 1958), 39.

⁵¹ S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The problem of Battle Command* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1947), 37-43.

morale; the same theory can be applied to better understand an operational planner's units too.⁵² Although it is important to consider the morale of each soldier, an organization will not fail when a soldier is not performing his best because of outside influencers. One soldier's bad day, or low morale, does not have the power to turn a unit combat ineffective. Operational planners must have an awareness of a unit's morale to ensure the decisions made either allow a unit to conduct a relief in place for rest and refit or remains in the fight with additional assignments.

To proceed in a study of psychological factors and its influence on soldier morale, a working definition of morale must be established. The definition of morale for this monograph is:

The whole complex body of an army's thought. The way it feels about the soil and about the people from which it springs. The way that it feels about their cause and their politics as compared with other causes and other politics. The way it feels about its friends and allies, as well as its' enemies. Discipline, order, pride and emotions and its will to fight. Life and death. God and the devil. The conditions of an army's existence.⁵³

Although an individual behavior, the broad definition captures the essence of morale for the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division fighting in Italy. Each sentence defines a sentiment felt during the Italian campaign. The individual parts, or sentences creating the definition, allow for the backdrop of understanding in the analysis of the soldiers fighting in Italy.

During the Second World War, the United States Army focused a great deal of time and resources toward understanding soldier morale. The Chief of Staff of the Army, General George C. Marshall, directed the creation of a monthly report published down to the regimental commander level. The report assisted the commanders in evaluating the status of their soldier's morale. Beginning in December 1943 through September 1945, the Morale Services Division,

⁵² Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 77.

⁵³ United States Army Services, Information and Education Division, "What the Soldier Thinks," *A Monthly Digest of War Department Studies on the Attitudes of American Troops*, no. 1 (December 1943): 1; Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage*, 92; Clausewitz, *On War*, 77; Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The problem of Battle Command*, 158; Picq, *Battle Studies*, 120.

Army Service Forces published “What the Soldier Thinks.”⁵⁴ The first publication defined specific morale attitudes and the path outlined by the Army to create an efficient soldier. The specific attitudes that can be improved directly were faith in the cause and in the future, pride and confidence in outfit, belief in the mission, confidence in training and equipment, realistic appraisal of the job ahead, satisfaction with job assignment, and belief in the army’s concern for individual welfare.⁵⁵

With the identification of seven specific morale attitudes, the Army created a working theory of morale for World War II soldiers, allowing for the goal of an efficient soldier and organization as a whole. This theory became the foundation for the subsequent sixteen volumes of “What the Soldier Thinks” as the Army continued with the struggles to ensure soldiers and their units maintained their combat effectiveness.⁵⁶ General George C. Marshall stated morale is “First in Importance” and in a July 1944 letter to commanding generals went on to say:

First in importance will be the development of a high morale and the building of a sound discipline, based on wise leadership and a spirit of mutual cooperation throughout all ranks. Morale, engendered by thoughtful consideration for officers and enlisted men by their commanders, will produce a cheerful and understanding subordination of the individual to the good of the team.⁵⁷

General Marshall’s statement helps to illustrate the point that the individual parts of morale constitute the whole and are of vital importance to the organization. Understanding the importance the Army placed on morale, as well as defining morale, allows for a better understanding of why soldiers fought in the Second World War.

⁵⁴ United States Army Services, “What the Soldier Thinks” (December 1943), 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁶ United States Army Services, “What the Soldier Thinks” no 1-16 (December 1943 – September 1945).

⁵⁷ United States Army Services, “What the Soldier Thinks” no. 7 (July 1944), 17.

Volturno River to the Winter Line: October – December 1943

During this time, the 34th Infantry Division gained firsthand knowledge of Italian geography and the impact it had on operational planning. As the division pursued the Germans toward the Volturno River, terrain limited the tactical options of Fifth Army. The ability to conduct wide envelopments with armor to create spearheads for exploitation was simply an impossibility. Frontal attacks were the only option for General Clark in the conduct of the war, with “every river, gully, ravine, and spur needing to be stormed.”⁵⁸

Crossing of the Volturno River constituted the first battles for the 34th Infantry Division, one that saw Fifth Army issue four operational instructions from October 2 – 20, 1943. Terrain, weather, corps boundary changes, difficulty in moving troops and supplies, and the enemy led to the constant operational changes at the army level.⁵⁹ General Clark had ordered Fifth Army to continue its advance north to the Isernia-Venafro-Sessa line. Fifth Army placed VI Corps on the right of their area of operations, constituting the valley of the upper Volturno, the steep foothills of the Apennines and a hill mass between the Volturno-Calore junction and Triflisco.⁶⁰ At this time, the 34th Infantry Division fell under the control of VI Corps and Major General John Lucas, who had determined one division, could cross the Volturno River.

VI Corps had a three-to-one advantage in men and equipment; however, the defense in depth deployed by the Germans mitigated the advantage. VI Corps tasked the 34th Infantry Division to force a crossing in its zone on the Volturno River, secure a bridgehead, assist the advance of the 45th Division, and prepare to attack on Corps order toward Teano.⁶¹ To compound the complexity of their tasks, VI Corps area of operation contained mountains ranging from 1000

⁵⁸ United States Fifth Army, *Fifth Army History Part II*, 2-4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-14.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

up to 1,900 feet. The mountains canalized frontal attacks that covered all avenues of approach available to the 34th Infantry Division. The Volturno River was only three to five feet deep, but it varied in width from 150-200 feet with its banks rising to fifteen feet in height, all of which created an excellent engagement area for the Germans. The division had one trafficable dirt road that had become muddy and was unable to sustain the division. However, it was within this area that the 34th was to make their first frontal attack against the Germans.

The 34th Infantry Division tasked the 168th Infantry Regiment as the main effort, giving them two objectives. Initially, they were to secure a bridgehead, occupying the high ground in the vicinity of San Giovanni. Next, they were to expand the bridgehead through occupation of the high ground surrounding it. On the right flank of the 168th was the 135th Infantry Regiment, tasked to protect the flank of the 168th and Fifth Army, and seize the high ground on the right flank.⁶² In order to achieve Fifth Army's objective of the Isernia-Venafro-Sessa line, the division crossed the Volturno River three times. The first crossing took place October 13 and the last one began on November 3. The execution of the operations involved night river crossings against an enemy defending in depth, with no roads for tanks or support vehicles to travel. During the first crossing, until the establishment of bridgeheads, assault boats carried all classes of supplies and casualties across the river.⁶³

As the 34th Infantry Division pushed forward in their frontal attack, the group cohesion built among the soldiers and their leaders presented itself, seen in the action of Second Lieutenant Howard R. Lieurance during the second crossing of the Volturno River. On the afternoon of October 27, 1943, while leading his platoon near Ailano, Italy, Second Lieutenant Lieurance's

⁶² United States Army, 168th Infantry Regiment, "Regimental History 12-21 October 1943" (Italy: Regimental History, 1943), 1; US Army Center of Military History, "From Volturno to the Winter Line," <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/volturno/volturno-moving.htm> (accessed October 22, 2013); Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 200.

⁶³ United States Army, 135th Infantry Regiment, "Regimental History Phase VII Across the Volturno" (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 7.

coolness under pressure allowed him the opportunity to provide clear guidance to his squad leaders before succumbing to his injuries. His platoon was under heavy enemy machine gun fire from a distance of 150 yards, as well as enemy artillery and mortar fire. In spite of this, Second Lieutenant Lieurance calmly called his squad leaders to provide instructions on how to maneuver the platoon out of danger, his actions “inspired his men and raised their morale considerably, adding immeasurably to the successful completion of the mission.”⁶⁴

In spite of enemy resistance, terrain, weather, and supply issues Fifth Army and VI Corps continually pushed the 34th Infantry Division to advance. Each crossing of the Volturno River constituted a small victory in pursuit of the final objective at the Isernia-Venafro-Sessa line. However, the continuous combat did have an impact on the division morale, with an observer noting of the 34th, “That division is tired.”⁶⁵ The problem for General Clark was he had no one to relieve any of his divisions on the line, let alone the 34th, so the push to move forward continued. On November 15, 1943, General Clark finally ordered a halt to the advance, providing two weeks for units to rest, refit, and prepare a plan to smash through the German Winter Line. This rest simply halted frontal attacks; the division continued patrolling along its front, which led to daily engagements with the Germans.

It was during this tactical pause, the 34th Infantry Division pulled the 135th Infantry Regiment from the frontline. The November 24, 1943 news was particularly welcome for the entire regiment. The men were happy because they would get to eat something other than cold C Rations, the staple during their sustained combat, and viewed a turkey dinner “with an almost fatalistic attitude.”⁶⁶ The decision to pull the 135th from the front line, providing them a hot meal,

⁶⁴ United States Army, 135th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-30 November 1943” (Italy: Regimental History, 1943), 15.

⁶⁵ Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 235.

⁶⁶ Leslie Bailey LTC (Retired), *Through Hell and High Water: The Wartime Memories of a Junior*

represents an operational decision that allowed the men of the 135th the ability to resume the offensive.

The challenge for operational planners is to know when a unit is close to reaching their collective breaking point. From November 29 to December 4, the 34th Infantry Division had barely moved a mile, fighting small unit maneuvers at a cost of nearly 800 casualties. The division was “exhausted and depleted” and on December 8 VI Corps commander Major General Lucas removed the division from the front line.⁶⁷ By this time, First Battalion 135th Infantry Regiment, specifically Charlie Company, had almost hit their breaking point. The company had seen seventy-six days of continuous combat and the company commander, Captain Leslie Bailey, stated, “Most of us had almost reached the breaking point under the stress of sustained combat.” On December 11, 1943, word came for the company, and regiment, to leave the front for rest and refit, of the 185 soldiers that moved to the front on September 27, 1943, only twenty-eight remained.⁶⁸ The operational decision to remove the 34th Infantry Division from the front line for rest, refit, and training ensured the division would have the ability to fight again.

To ensure soldiers maintained their fighting edge, the 133rd Infantry Regiment developed a detailed rest and refit plan from December 11-30, 1943. During this time, the accomplishment of tasks such as bathing, cleaning equipment, and assimilating replacements into the group occurred. To reinforce esprit-de-corps and strong leadership, a training program was established focusing on physical training, scouting, and small unit patrolling.⁶⁹ This allowed the soldiers to maintain their veteran intuitions but most importantly, it provided an opportunity for the veterans

Combat Infantry Officer (New York: Vantage Press, 1994), 147.

⁶⁷ Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 268-269.

⁶⁸ Bailey, *Through Hell and High Water: The Wartime Memories of a Junior Combat Infantry Officer*, 152-154; 135th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History October-December 1943”.

⁶⁹ United States Army, 133rd Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-31 December 1943” (Italy: Regimental History, 1943), 1.

to share their knowledge with the new replacements. The other regimental teams were no different in their training programs, all of which followed the objectives as stated by the 34th Division Training Memorandum No. 16 stating, “The restoration of a fine state of discipline, the improvement of combat efficiency, and the physical conditioning of all members of the command.”⁷⁰ This rest time served the men of the division well, as they were soon to face their most intense combat to date at Cassino.

The literature on combat exhaustion stated a soldier reached the exhaustive state between 25-120 days, based upon internal and external factors. During this period, the intensity of combat seen by the soldiers suggests combat exhaustion occurred relatively quickly. Decisions such as pulling the 135th Infantry Regiment during Thanksgiving and providing them a hot meal, offering a brief reprise from combat, gave soldiers the ability to continue the fight. However, seventy-five days of combat against the Germans on the terrain the 34th Infantry Division fought, defies the literature on soldier effectiveness. Firsthand accounts state units, not individuals, had reached their breaking point and effectiveness. Solid leadership at the division through company level pushed the soldiers to continue the fight.⁷¹ Leadership and group cohesion, married with the “Steam Roller” concept set the conditions for success during the division’s first battle in Italy.

The ability to answer the question of what is the right amount of time for a unit to rest and refit is problematic. External and internal variables such as enemy, weather, terrain, and the season, and group cohesiveness make each campaign and battle unique. Until an organization fights for the first time in the campaign, operational planners cannot know with any certainty when a unit will become combat ineffective. Using past combat experiences as a benchmark will

⁷⁰ United States Army, 168th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-30 June 1944” (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 12.

⁷¹ General John Vessey (ret), interview by author via email and US Postal Service, October 25, 2013, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

not provide an accurate assessment either. The 34th Infantry Division's combat experience in North Africa during the summer of 1943 was dramatically different from their first battles in Italian mountains during the winter months. The key to determining if the 34th Infantry Division received proper rest after nineteen days away from the front did not lie in the past, but in the future and the division's combat performance during the Battle of Cassino.

Cassino: January - February 1944

As the 34th Infantry Division continued their advance north, they marched into history at Cassino. Cassino stood at the strategic junction of two valleys, commanding a view of both and ultimately holding the fate for the battle of Italy. Mountains over 5,000 feet high toward over the valley, shaping the battleground leading to Cassino, creating a ten-mile wide corridor canalizing all traffic. Because of the terrain the enemy held the initiative, dictating when and where fighting would occur. The Italians considered the area impregnable to any army attempting to capture Rome from the south, but it was against this European "Rock of Gibraltar" that the 34th Infantry Division advanced.⁷²

In an attempt to gain the initiative in the deadlocked south and move quickly into Rome, Fifth Army planned an amphibious landing of VI Corps at Anzio, in conjunction with an offensive at Cassino. II Corps was to open the Liri Valley and seize the high ground northwest of Cassino, eventually linking with the landing force from Anzio and push to Rome.⁷³ However, in order to reach the impregnable Cassino the 34th Infantry Division had to fight through the German Winter Line, a defense built in-depth running approximately nine kilometers from San Vittore to

⁷² Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino*, 16-23; Starr, ed., *From Salerno to the Alps: A History of the Fifth Army 1943-1945*, 79; Eric Linklater, *The Campaign in Italy* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1951), 164; United States Fifth Army, *Fifth Army History Part IV: Cassino and Anzio* (Florence, Italy: L'Impronta Press, 1944), 8.

⁷³ Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 352; Starr, ed., *From Salerno to the Alps: A History of the Fifth Army 1943-1945*, 73.

Cassino. The division moved back to the front on December 29, 1943 to begin its attack against the Winter Line under the command of II Corps and Major General Geoffrey Keyes.⁷⁴

The tasking for the 34th Infantry Division was to take the hills north of San Vittore to break the enemy line anchored against the mountains with a follow on mission to attack Mount Trocchio, the last obstacle prior to Cassino. On the night of January 4, battle once again came to the men.⁷⁵ As in previous operations, terrain dictated a frontal attack through mountainous terrain against dug in Germans. The iced mountain passes extended nearly ten miles, constituting the ground lines of communication, and were only passable by soldiers hauling supplies or mules carrying the supplies. At times, the level of combat was so intense the soldiers had to drive the Germans from their positions by bayonet.⁷⁶ It was once again during this time that the leaders of the 34th Infantry Division stood fast in the face of danger to lead their men through combat.

The commander of the third battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Fillmore K. Mearns, gallant actions on the night of January 16, 1944 were an act of heroism and caring for his soldiers, which inspired his command. While conducting a reconnaissance with one of his companies across the Rapido River west of Mount Trocchio, Italy, there were explosions to the rear of the formation. Elements of the company had walked into a minefield, resulting in seven soldiers seriously wounded and all attempts to reach the soldiers resulted in additional casualties. Lieutenant Colonel Mearns devised a plan and personally began to open a path to the injured soldiers with a long pole to prod the soil ahead of him. He also found, and used, a wood door to slam onto the ground he prodded to ensure he did not miss any mines. The task became more difficult upon the detection of enemy in the area and the added danger of enemy direct

⁷⁴ Starr, ed., *From Salerno to the Alps: A History of the Fifth Army 1943-1945*, 72.

⁷⁵ Starr, ed., *From Salerno to the Alps: A History of the Fifth Army 1943-1945*, 72; United States Army, 135th Infantry Regiment, "Phase VII San Vittore" (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 4.

⁷⁶ Ankrum, *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears in World War II*, 379; United States Army, 133rd Infantry Regiment, "Regimental History 1-31 January 1944" (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 1.

fire.⁷⁷ Lieutenant Colonel Mearns personal actions saved his men, but more importantly, it solidified the mutual trust and respect between a combat leader and his soldiers. In determined fashion, the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division broke through the Winter Line and stood ready to engage in one of the most intense battles of the war.

The 34th Infantry Division's battle for Cassino started January 24, 1944.⁷⁸ Once again, terrain dictated tactics and a frontal attack was the only option, but this time the terrain was even more heavily reinforced as the Germans decided to make a stand at Cassino. The operational plan had the 34th Infantry Division crossing the Rapido River north of Cassino with the 135th and 133rd Infantry Regiments, with the 168th Infantry Regiment passing to the north to exploit the success. Upon crossing the river, the 135th Infantry Regiment would go south towards Cassino while the 133rd Infantry Regiment traveled through the mountains to seize the high ground dominating Cassino and to attack the enemy's rear. The 168th Infantry Regiment would pass to the right of the 133rd to seize Cairo, a small town north of Cassino.⁷⁹ Although the attack began on January 24, it took seven days, until January 30, for the 168th Infantry to seize the town of Cairo.⁸⁰ Although the division maintained its operational plan during the battle, losses from stiff German resistance required the division to rotate its regiments around the battlefield.⁸¹

The designated Rapido River crossing spot was fordable for the soldiers, but the Germans

⁷⁷ United States Army, 135th Infantry Regiment, "Regimental History 1-31 January 1944" (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 16.

⁷⁸ United States Army, G-3, 34th Infantry Division, "Narrative of Events and Journal of AC of G-3, 34th InfDiv, 1-31 January 1944" (Italy: G-3 Journal, 1944), 2.

⁷⁹ United States Army, 168th Infantry Regiment, "Crossing the Rapido River January 1944" (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 1; G-3, 34th Infantry Division, "Narrative of Events and Journal of AC of G-3, 34th InfDiv, 1-31 January 1944," 2-3; Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino*, 16-23; Starr, ed., *From Salerno to the Alps: A History of the Fifth Army 1943-1945*, 98.

⁸⁰ G-3, 34th Infantry Division, "Narrative of Events and Journal of AC of G-3, 34th InfDiv, 1-31 January 1944," 2-3.

⁸¹ G-3, 34th Infantry Division, "Narrative of Events and Journal of AC of G-3, 34th InfDiv, 1-29 February 1944" (Italy: G-3 Journal, 1944), 1-2.

had blown a dam flooding the ground on the near side turning the ground into a marsh in trafficable for tanks. Once across the river, the soldiers had to travel approximately two miles through mined, open space rung with wire and covered by enemy positions. When the soldiers made it through this reinforced obstacle, they had to attack into the mountains. Until the soldiers established security and a bridgehead over the river, they would not have the benefit of armor support during their assaults. Figure one illustrates the terrain surrounding Cassino, the flooded Rapido River and the operational plan for the 34th Infantry Division in January 1944. It also illustrates the mountain bridgehead gained by the 34th Infantry Division's offensive ending in February 1944.

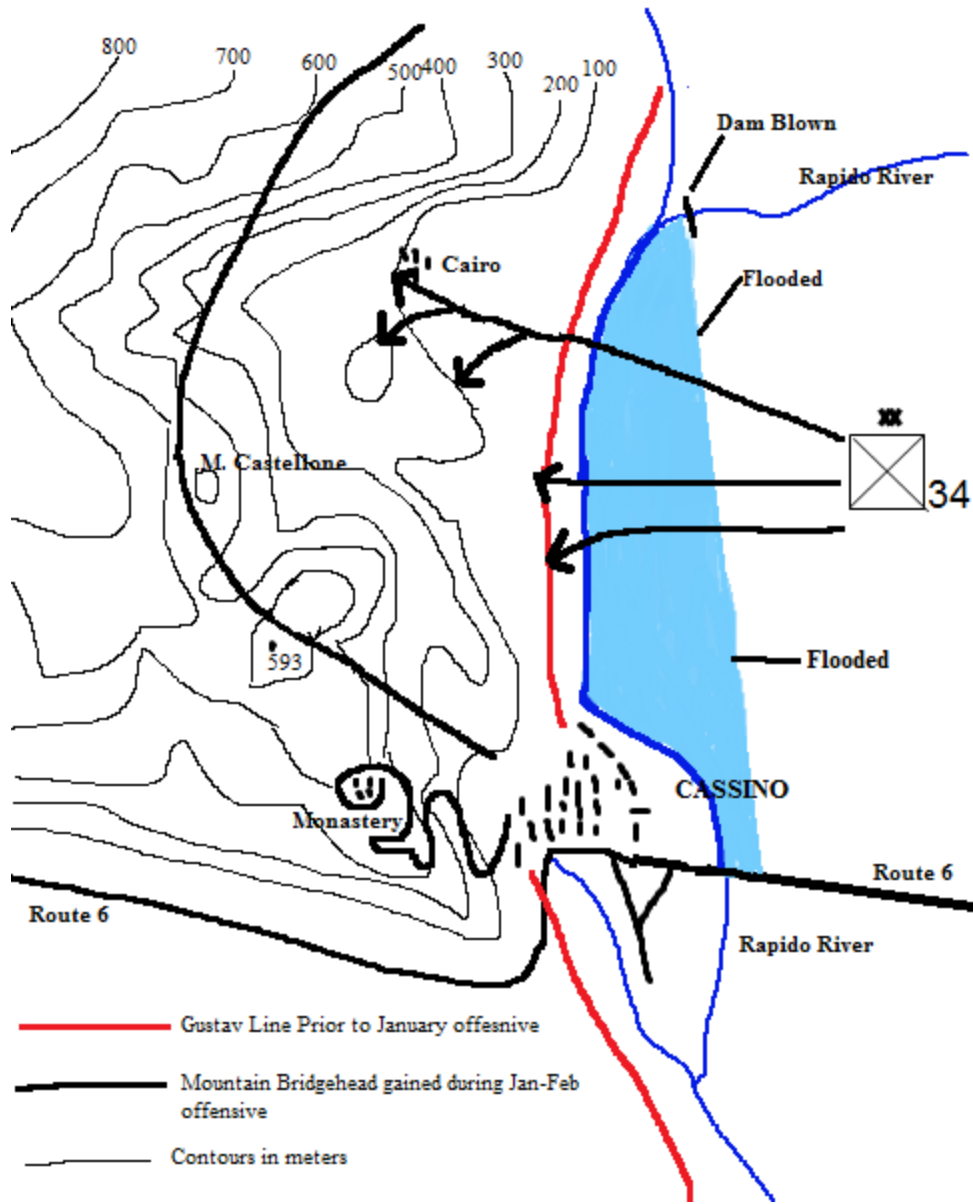


Figure 1. Cassino, January – February 1944.

Throughout the entire battle of Cassino, the Germans held the high ground and inflicted horrendous casualties upon the 34th Infantry Division. The German defense meant soldiers from the three battalions of the 133rd Infantry Regiment measured their daily advances during the battle

in yards and the number of buildings captured.⁸² The 34th Infantry Division did not achieve its objective of seizing the high ground near Cassino to attack the Germans rear, but they did not stop trying. Over the course of nine days from February 13-22, the soldiers of the 4th Indian Division relieved the three infantry regiments on the front line. Upon relief by the 4th Indian Division, some soldiers were able to man their positions but unable to leave them by their own power because of exhaustion and cold. The soldiers of the 4th Indian Division had to carry out the soldiers on litters and it eventually took five divisions to complete the task assigned the 34th Infantry Division.⁸³

By the time the 34th Infantry Division conducted their relief from the front line, the strength all three infantry regiments was extremely low. The 133rd and 168th Infantry Regiment's battalions were below 50% authorized strength and the rifle companies of the 135th Regiment were down to fifty men, with some as low as thirty.⁸⁴ Upon relief from the front line, all three infantry regiments went into their own respective rest and refit assembly areas. It was within these areas that leaders started the process of rebuilding an exhausted fighting force through training and rest. The regiments took the first few days to provide showers and hot food to their soldiers. For many this was the first shower they had since the beginning of the battle, as well as the first hot meal in over two weeks.

The regiments did however start training for the next operation almost immediately upon their arrival in their assembly areas, doing so with a balance of training and rest unique to each

⁸² United States Army, 133th Infantry Regiment, "Regimental History 1-29 February 1944" (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 8.

⁸³ E.J. Kahn, Jr and Henry McLemore, *Fighting Divisions* (Washington D.C.: The Infantry Journal, 1945), 68; Majdalany, *The Battle of Cassino*, 85.

⁸⁴ United States Army, 133rd Infantry Regiment, "Regimental History 1-29 February 1944" (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 1-3; United States Army, 135th Infantry Regiment, "Regimental History 1-29 February 1944" (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 7; United States Army, 168th Infantry Regiment, "Regimental History 24 January – 29 February 1944" (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 16.

regiment. The 135th Infantry Regiment began training on February 17, 1944, but doing so for only an hour and half per day through March 1, 1944; the remaining time was for soldier rest. As the regiment moved into March, training intensified focusing on small unit tactics and patrolling for an unknown period before their next movement to the frontline.⁸⁵ The 168th Infantry Regiment allowed its soldiers to rest from February 16 – 28, 1944, offering showers and movies daily. Upon the initiation of their training plan on March 1, 1944, the regiment began integration of new officers and non-commissioned officers into the formations and subsequently the building of cohesive and trained teams. Upon integration of leaders, the training progressed into squad and platoon attacks as well as battalion in defense.⁸⁶ Although the rest was shorter than anticipated, it allowed the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division to continue the fight and eventually push towards Rome.

After fighting through the Winter Line, the 34th Infantry Division had nineteen days of rest and refit. Comparing that amount of time against the performance of the 34th Infantry Division during the Battle of Cassino, it can be determined that the soldiers were provided adequate time to rest and refit. After relief from the front line, the division had approximately thirty days of rest and refit prior to their insertion into the Anzio beachhead. Based upon their last combat performance coming out of rest and refit, the decision by operational planners allowed the division to continue the fight. During this time, two specific factors allowed the soldiers to continue the fight: leadership and group solidarity.

Anzio to Rome: March – June 1944

Anzio sits approximately fifty miles, an hour by vehicle, from Rome, but the fifty miles

⁸⁵ 135th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-29 February 1944,” 7, United States Army, 135th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-31 March 1944” (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 7.

⁸⁶ 168th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 24 January – 29 February 1944,” 17; United States Army, 168th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-31 March 1944” (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 1.

took over four months of intense combat for the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division to reach Rome.⁸⁷ Initially meant to break the stalemate along the Cassino front by opening a second front that would converge with Cassino for the final drive to Rome, the Anzio landing itself stagnated too. However, once the 34th Infantry Division arrived at Anzio, a breakout from the beachhead eventually occurred. The decision by General Clark to turn and march to Rome has become the point of much debate. In spite of criticism, the decision would have a positive effect on the soldiers of Fifth Army and the 34th Infantry Division.

General Marshall had frequently stressed a need to seize Rome before the D-Day invasion, a sentiment supported by General Clark. In April 1944, while in the United States for rest, General Clark briefed General Marshall the allies plan to seize Rome. However, the concept of operations developed by 15th Army Group Commander, Field Marshall Harold Alexander, did not directly involve Rome but instead was designed to capture German forces between Fifth Army and Eight Army. To accomplish this, the tasking for VI Corps had them advance to “cut highway six in the Valmontone area to prevent the withdrawal and resupply of the German Tenth Army opposing the advance of Eight and Fifth Army.”⁸⁸ Rome laid in a divergent direction from Valmontone, further fuelling the controversy of Clark’s decisions. Always suspicious of British intentions, General Clark stated, “We not only wanted the honor of capturing Rome, but we felt that we more than deserved it ... nothing was going to stop us on our push toward the Italian capital.”⁸⁹

In his memoirs, Field Marshall Alexander, stated his belief that had General Clark followed his plan “the disaster to the enemy would have been much greater; indeed, most of the

⁸⁷ George F. Botjer, *Sideshow War: The Italian Campaign, 1943-1945* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1996), 102-103.

⁸⁸ Blaxland, *Alexander’s Generals: The Italian Campaign, 1944-1945*, 111.

⁸⁹ Blumenson, *Mark Clark: The Last of the Great World War II Commanders*, 199-202.

German forces south of Rome would have been destroyed.”⁹⁰ Field Marshall Alexander may have been correct in his assessment, and his plan did stay the course with the strategic objective of the campaign, but it did not take into account the fighting the allied soldiers had endured the previous nine months. General Vessey stated, “It was a long difficult campaign and we thought it would never end. The capture of Rome was the best day of the war for us. We liberated a major capital and were greeted by hundreds of thousands of cheering Italians.”⁹¹ Alexander failed to understand the physical and mental toll fighting had taken on the soldiers. Clark’s determination to capture Rome was in stark contrast to Field Marshall Alexander’s plan, but the operational impact of the decision positively affected the ranks of the 34th Infantry Division.

The arrangement of tactical actions by Fifth Army had all been to get to this point, the doorsteps of Rome. Initially conceived as a major operation deep behind enemy lines to draw German forces from the Cassino front to Anzio, presenting Fifth Army an opportunity to breakthrough Cassino and advance towards Frosinone, the January 1943 Anzio landing did not immediately achieve its designed objective.⁹² The Anzio beachhead stalled and did not draw German forces from the Cassino front, but in May 1944, the two separate fronts of Fifth Army finally presented themselves as opportunities to seize Rome. General Clark’s decision to change the direction of VI Corps attack northwest towards Rome, took advantage of the tactical situation created by the Anzio landing five months earlier. On May 25, 1944, the 34th Infantry Division led the breakout from the beachhead, attacking with two regiments abreast to seize Lanuvio, Italy, which led to the capture of Rome.⁹³ Unfortunately, the division attacked into the German I

⁹⁰ Blaxland, Alexander’s Generals: The Italian Campaign, 1944-1945, 136-137.

⁹¹ General John Vessey (ret), interview by author via email and US Postal Service, October 25, 2013, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

⁹² Blumenson, The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino, 353-354.

⁹³ Blumenson, The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino, 166; LTG Mark Clark to MG Charles Ryder, July 20, 1944, Box 1, Series I. Correspondence, Subseries B: Special Name

Parachute Corps and was unable to seize Lanuvio until June 3.⁹⁴ On June 5, 1944, the 135th infantry regiment marched into Rome, claiming the honor of being the first infantry regiment to enter the city.⁹⁵

The Italian campaign was above all a mountain campaign fought not by massed mechanized formations, but at the small unit level. Through the development of group cohesion, coupled with great leadership, individuals formed into units executing small unit operations to achieve success. The men of the 34th Infantry Division followed this path, and through their “morale, training, and endurance came the success of local actions and of the campaign.”⁹⁶ During the 34th Infantry Divisions drive to Rome, actions at the regiment through individual level validate the statement that morale, endurance, group cohesion and leadership allowed the men to succeed.

Upon relief from Cassino, the 133rd moved to the Anzio beachhead where nightly German artillery barrages and air attacks were a common occurrence. In his monthly historical submission, the commanding officer of the 133rd, Colonel W.H. Schildroth, stated, “Morale of our troops throughout the period was comparatively high.”⁹⁷ Through three months of intensive combat, that included the loss of almost 50% of the regiment in Cassino and nightly enemy artillery strikes and air attacks on the Anzio beachhead, the leaders and soldiers of the regiment still maintained high morale.

As a small unit campaign, the development of group cohesion became the foundation of

Correspondence, Records of MG Charles Ryder, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁹⁴ Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino*, 201-202.

⁹⁵ Ankrum, *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears in World War II*, 533; United States Army, 135th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-30 June 1944” (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 4.

⁹⁶ Starr, ed., *From Salerno to the Alps: A History of the Fifth Army 1943-1945*, 447.

⁹⁷ United States Army, 133rd Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1- 30 April 1944” (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 2.

success for the 34th Infantry Division. Although the division started the war predominately composed of men from the Midwest, casualties and their replacements turned the division into a composite of American society, to include Furman L. Smith. A farm boy from rural Piedmont, South Carolina, Private Furman L. Smith had never spent a night away from his family prior to becoming eligible for the draft shortly after his 18th birthday in May 1943.⁹⁸ Assigned to Third Battalion, 135th Regiment, Private Smith won the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions on May 31, 1944 near Lanuvio, Italy, exemplifying the regimental motto “To The Last Man.”⁹⁹ His award citation illustrates the power of group solidarity and the sacrifices soldiers are willing to make for each other:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. In its attack on a strong point, an infantry company was held up by intense enemy fire. The group to which Pvt. Smith belonged was far in the lead when attacked by a force of 80 Germans. The squad leader and 1 other man were seriously wounded and other members of the group withdrew to the company positions, but Pvt. Smith refused to leave his wounded comrades. He placed them in the shelter of shell craters and then alone faced a strong enemy counterattack, temporarily checking it by his accurate rifle fire at close range, killing and wounding many foe. Against overwhelming odds, he stood his ground until shot down and killed, rifle in hand.¹⁰⁰

The 34th Infantry Division had nine Medal of Honor recipients for actions during their time in Italy. All the citations read of gallantry and risk of life for fellow comrades. Comrades, who were strangers but a handful of years ago, were now brothers that warranted self-sacrifice. Group cohesion drove the soldiers forward during battle but operational decisions at Army and Corps level allowed units to continue the fight to Rome. However, the 34th Infantry Division had

⁹⁸ Charles D. Taylor, “Twenty Miles to Rome: The Story of South Carolina’s First Medal of Honor Winner in World War II” (master’s thesis, Clemson University, 2009), under http://etd.lib.clemson.edu/documents/1285611727/Taylor_clemson_0050M_10328.pdf (accessed July 18, 2013), 1, 74.

⁹⁹ The Institute of Heraldry, “Army Mottos” Office of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army, <http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/UniformedServices/mottos.aspx> (accessed on September 19, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ Congressional Medal of Honor Society, “Smith, Furman L.,” <http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-detail/3002/smith-furman-l.php> (accessed September 19, 2013).

eleven more months of combat in Italy before the war would end for them.

North Apennines: July 1944 – April 1945

During June 1944, the 34th Infantry Division quickly pursued the retreating Germans north, in an attempt to prevent the Germans from integrating defensive positions into the terrain. Through continued pursuit, the division took the initiative and terrain advantage away from the Germans, who had previously taken full advantage the terrain offered in the fighting south of Rome. The objective of the pursuit was to push the Germans into the Gothic Line, then break through the line into the Alps. However, terrain did not favor the division and in the Gothic Line, the Germans had created one of the most formidable defensive lines in Europe. Getting to the Gothic Line was not easy; with the entire division, receiving a rest in July 1944 after intensive combat “brought all ranks close to exhaustion.”¹⁰¹ August offered unique opportunities for rest, recreation, and rehabilitation unseen at any point in the campaign. As a result, “combat fatigue was quickly overcome” and the division was in a “high state of morale” and prepared for combat.¹⁰²

The Gothic Line ran almost 180 miles along the Northern Apennines Mountains facing south, and integrated into the mountains themselves. In contrast to the northern face of the Northern Apennines that gently flowed into the valley of the Po, the southern face of the Northern Apennines was just as inhospitable as the Southern Apennines.¹⁰³ However, the opportunity did finally present itself for the men of the 34th Infantry Division to use the terrain to their advantage. Near the Cecina River in Northern Italy, the soldiers of the 168th Infantry Regiment finally gained

¹⁰¹ Ernest F. Fisher, Jr, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Cassino to the Alps* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1977), 280.

¹⁰² United States Army, G-3. 34th Infantry Division, “Narrative of Events and Journal of AC of G-3, 34th InfDiv, August 1944” (Italy: G-3 Journal, 1944), 1.

¹⁰³ Fisher, Jr, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Cassino to the Alps*, 297-300.

a marked advantage from the terrain. Since their landing in Salerno, the men had been accustomed to an uphill fight against the Germans. For once however, they held the high ground and “poured it to them,” raising the morale of the men.¹⁰⁴

In the event of an allied invasion of Italy, the Gothic Line acted as a defensive position the Germans could retreat behind. Completion of the line did not end until fall of 1944, but the Germans succeeded in creating another impressive defense for the men of the 34th Infantry Division to breach. The Germans had evacuated all civilians twenty kilometers out from the main line of resistance, creating a “dead zone” of engagement. Additionally, within the zone all possible ground lines of communication were prepared for demolition or destroyed.¹⁰⁵ Once again, this forced divisional movements to follow mountain trails for their attacks, resupply operations and evacuation of casualties.

In creating the canalized routes, the Germans mined the trails and covered them by well-prepared machine gun positions. As the 133rd Infantry Regiment approached the Gothic Line, working within the “dead zone” the regiment initially created six-mile long litter chains to haul casualties from the front line to waiting ambulances. However, as the advance proceeded into the mountains and closer to the Gothic Line, the division’s lines of communication grew longer, eventually reaching almost eight miles and under constant enemy observation. To resupply the front line, the 133rd used 170 mules and 250 Italian muleskinners to haul food, ammunition, and water, but four to five mules a night fell off the steep cliffs and narrow trails. During their attack on the Gothic Line, the 133rd Regiment suffered their highest rate of casualties in such a short time of combat, with 91 killed and 432 wounded in nine days of fighting.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ United States Army, 168th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-31 July 1944” (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 18.

¹⁰⁵ Fisher, Jr, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Cassino to the Alps*, 297-300.

¹⁰⁶ United States Army, 133rd Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-30 September 1944”

During the attack of the Gothic Line, the 34th Infantry Division fell under the control of Lieutenant General Keyes and his Second Corps. General Keyes's plan of attack called for all four infantry divisions under his command to attack along a broad front, but this plan left him no corps reserve. To mitigate the risk, and ensure his divisions could sustain the fight during the attack, General Keyes ordered his division commanders to hold one infantry regiment in reserve and rotate that unit to the front line approximately once every five days. The phasing of the operation was broken into approximately five-day periods, thus every new attack employed a fresh infantry regiment coming out of a five-day rest.¹⁰⁷ From an operational perspective, this plan mitigated all the aspects of soldier combat exhaustion because no infantry regiments' time on the front line would exceed ten days. Based upon the medical studies of combat exhaustion and theories of morale, under this plan the men of the 34th Infantry Division had the ability to sustain the fight indefinitely.

The 34th Infantry Division's implementation of the regimental rotational plan began October 1, 1944, with the 133rd and 168th Infantry Regiments abreast on the front line and the 135th Infantry Regiment in reserve. On October 5, the first rotation of regiments began. In order to maintain constant pressure on the Germans, the division rotated the 135th with the 133rd over the course of three days, concluding on October 8. During this time, the rotation process went battalion-by-battalion, with the 135th Regimental headquarters taking full control after its units had replaced their counter parts with the 133rd.¹⁰⁸ Also on October 8, the division received orders from II Corps to have two regiments available for an attack on October 15. To facilitate the tasking, II Corps provided Combat Command A of the 1st Armored Division to relieve not only

(Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 7-8.

¹⁰⁷ Fisher, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Cassino to the Alps*, 363.

¹⁰⁸ United States Army, G-3. 34th Infantry Division, "Historical Narrative and Journal of AC of G-3, October 1944" (Italy: G-3 Journal, 1944), 1-2.

the 133rd, but also the 168th Regiment, with the 1st Armored Division taking operational control of the 135th.¹⁰⁹ This action by the corps and division provided six days of rest for the 133rd and 168th before the new attack commenced on October 13, a change from the original date.

However, as with all plans in combat, the enemy has a say in matters. By October 15, 1944, the Germans had reinforced the front facing II Corps with an additional two divisions. The four divisions of II Corps now faced six German divisions arrayed in a defensive posture along the Gothic Line and in the Northern Apennines.¹¹⁰ Second Corps' attempted a breakthrough before the onset of winter, with the 34th Infantry Division once again thrown into the fight. By now, even General Clark believed the division was "diseased" from chronic battle weariness from two and half years of nearly constant combat.¹¹¹ The division did not break through in their attack and the front stabilized for the coming winter in the Northern Apennines. Although fighting along the front continued through the winter, it was not until April 1945, that the 34th Infantry Division finally broke through the Gothic Line, to enter the Po Valley for their last taste of combat.

The 34th Infantry Division spent four months fighting along the Gothic Line probing for a weakness to execute a breakthrough.¹¹² Although driven from one end of the Italian peninsula to the other, the Germans still offered fierce resistance. The artillery and mortar strength brought to bear upon the men of the 34th Infantry Division was as formidable as any portion of the Fifth Army front during the entire campaign. At times, the Germans not only matched the division's shelling round for round, but also often exceeded it in volume.¹¹³ As observed by General Clark, the men of the 34th Infantry Division were in fact reaching the limits of their combat endurance.

¹⁰⁹ G-3, 34th Infantry Division, "Historical Narrative and Journal of AC of G-3, October 1944, 3.

¹¹⁰ Fisher, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Cassino to the Alps*, 375.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 379.

¹¹² Kahn and McLemore, *Fighting Divisions*, 68.

¹¹³ United States Army, 133rd Infantry Regiment, "Regimental History 1-31 October 1944" (Italy: Regimental History, 1944), 31-32.

Po Valley April – May 1945

The last battle of the Second World War for the men of the 34th Infantry Division began late on April 15, 1945. Replacement soldiers sat staring at the old veterans of eighteen months of combat and hundreds of assaults, “wondering how they had survived this long.”¹¹⁴ The group bond formed by the veterans allowed them to maintain their morale, but most importantly, it provided strength to continue the fight. The replacements stared because they knew these men had survived previous assaults, but this was to be their first and with it, they too would join the unbreakable bond of combat infantry soldiers. Unbeknownst to them at the time, the men of the division had this one last battle to undertake against the Germans before they headed home. The 34th Infantry Division had the responsibility to secure II Corps right flank as well as assist the 91st Division in their advance. The division Headquarters assigned the 168th Infantry Regiment as the main effort, having them conduct a passage of lines with the 133rd Infantry Regiment. Knowing that the battle area had heavy defensive positions, the division created a series of limited objectives controlled by phase lines that allowed for continued success and better command and control of the operation at the division level.¹¹⁵ This division operational decision increased morale too, as the men continually moved forward and achieved success after success.

During the winter, the Po Valley became synonymous with being the gateway to ending the war. April 16 constituted “the” day to reach the valley and the end of the war. Morale among the men increased as reports from Fifth Army’s front indicated initial success, the men were anxious to finally leave the mountains behind them and enter the flat valley. As the battle ensued, spirits continued to rise as it became apparent this was the last push.¹¹⁶ The Red Bulls

¹¹⁴ Ankrum, *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears in World War II*, 630.

¹¹⁵ United States Army, 168th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-30 April 1945,” (Italy: Regimental History, 1945), 3.

¹¹⁶ United States Army, 135th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History Phase XIV Attack 12 April 1945” (Italy: Regimental History, 1945), 2.

“500th day of combat” came on April 16, 1945, as the division fought “hand-to-hand for a church near Gorgognana, Italy.¹¹⁷ The Germans continued their stubborn resistance in the north, but “Fifth Army had come down out of the Apennines with such a rush and in such a concentrated strength” that the German Army was simply overrun. The battle turned into a “gigantic mopping-up operation,” one that saw the Red Bulls solidify their legacy for the war.¹¹⁸ By April 19, 1945, the 34th Infantry Division pushed to control the northern exits from the Po Valley.¹¹⁹

Over the course of April 23-26, the division pushed 80 miles from Modena to the Po Crossings at Piacenza with its three infantry regiments stretched along the entire 80 miles. Considered one of the “boldest maneuvers in the entire drive across the Po Valley,” the division opened itself to attack from three German divisions. However, low morale and complete disarray in the German military prevented the Germans from mounting a coordinated attack.¹²⁰ After nearly two and half years of continuous combat, twenty months of it in Italy, the men of the 34th Infantry Division had reached the climax of their war. Combat operations eventually gave way to stability operations and with the change in focus, finally came time for the soldiers to rest and enjoy recreational activities. The 168th Infantry Regiment reduced work days to only six hours, with the remaining time provided for soldiers to play sports and recreational activities.¹²¹

As a fighting force in Italy, the Germans no longer possessed the ability to continue the fight. On April 29, 1945, front line combat operations ended for the 34th Infantry Division. In a

¹¹⁷ Allied Forces 15th Army Group, *Finito!: The Po Valley Campaign 1945* (Milan, Italy: Rizzoli, 1945), 44.

¹¹⁸ United States Fifth Army, *19 Days: The Final Campaign Across Northwest Italy, 14 April-2 May 1945* (Nashville: Battery Press, 1987), 58-59.

¹¹⁹ Fisher, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Cassino to the Alps*, 506.

¹²⁰ United States Fifth Army, *Fifth Army History Part IX: Race to the Alps* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1945), 114-115.

¹²¹ United States Army, 168th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-31 May 1945” (Italy: Regimental History, 1945), 3.

fitting climax to the 597 days in Italy endured by the 34th Infantry Division, one of the last tasks for the division was to receive the surrender of the German 34th Infantry Division. On April 29, Colonel John Breit, commander of the 135th Infantry Regiment, negotiated the surrender of the nearly 40,000 German troops in the 5th Mountain Division, the 34th Division, and air naval elements along the western seaboard of Italy.¹²² The surrender of German troops ended the war in Italy, and the “twilight of hell had settled in and tomorrow would be the dawning of the first day of peace.”¹²³

ANALYSIS

It is not the number of soldiers, but their will to win which decides battles.

—John C. Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage*

Carl von Clausewitz stated in *On War*, “The troops’ national feeling is most apparent in mountain warfare where every man, down to the individual soldier, is on his own.”¹²⁴ The war for Italy was a war fought at the small-unit level, successful because of the development of group cohesion and strong leadership. Terrain dictated that companies, platoons, and squads operated independent of each other, with ravines, rivers and ridges preventing the development of mutually supporting actions. Instead of contributing to their defeat, the terrain of the campaign, much as forced living arrangements did, further developed and strengthened the group cohesion of the men. The soldiers were required to rely upon their “morale, training and endurance” for localized success.¹²⁵ Success at the small-unit level led to the successful execution of the campaign by the division. However, as the fighting progressed up the Italian peninsula, terrain continuously

¹²² Ankrum, *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears in World War II*, 639; 168th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 1-31 May 1945,” 1.

¹²³ Ankrum, *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears in World War II*, 639.

¹²⁴ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 218.

¹²⁵ Starr, ed., *From Salerno to the Alps: A History of the Fifth Army 1943-1945*, 447.

influenced operational decisions. At times, the rate of advance was approximately one mile, but one mile of linear advance generally meant four miles of bewildering mountain climbing.¹²⁶ Aided by operational planning that allowed the 34th Infantry Division the ability to continue the fight, the development of an unbreakable group bond allowed the small-unit to overcome the effects of terrain, weather, and the Germans, but it came at a cost.

By the end of the Second World War, the 34th Infantry Division had reached the point of group exhaustion. Sustained combat created more than combat weariness, it created a form of general war weariness for the entire division. Providing periods of rest and refit begun to have little impact in restoring the fighting ability of the division.¹²⁷ Lieutenant General L. K. Truscott, who had taken command of Fifth Army from General Clark on December 16, 1944, held the belief that nothing was necessarily wrong with the 34th Infantry Division, nor was it anything that could not be fixed. As a veteran of the Italian campaign himself, General Truscott sympathized with the leaders of the 34th Infantry Division and their war weariness. General Truscott had commanded VI Corps during its drive to Rome, which had included the 34th Infantry Division. By making the division “feel that only the best was expected of it,” the division would continue the fight.¹²⁸ General Truscott stated, “It is not hard to maintain morale when troops are advancing and winning victories.”¹²⁹ Ultimately, this leadership philosophy, coupled with the “Steam Roller” operating concept, allowed the men of the 34th Infantry Division to continue the fight beyond medically recognized limits.

Providing distant objectives and pushing the division until the achievement of the

¹²⁶ United States Army, 168th Infantry Regiment, “Regimental History 12-21 October 1943” (Italy: Regimental History, 1943), 11.

¹²⁷ L. K. Truscott, Jr, *Command Missions: A Personal Story* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc, 1954), 461.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 462-464.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 459.

objective, or the division no longer possessed the ability to continue, was a deliberate decision by Fifth Army. In *On War*, Clausewitz identifies “frequent exertions of the army to the utmost limits of its strength” as a source that provided for the spirit of morale in an army.”¹³⁰ Fifth Army and Second and Sixth Corps adopted these ideas because of the limited number of divisions operating in the theater. Seen in the five battles the division fought in, is the application of this approach, but specifically during the Winter Line, Cassino, and Rome. Fighting to the Winter Line, the 34th Infantry Division achieved their operational objective, however they did so at the expense of nearly becoming combat exhausted as a unit. At Cassino, the division failed to achieve its mission, but stayed on the front line until it no longer possessed the ability to fight. In the Battle of Rome, Rome itself served as the distant objective that kept the soldiers moving forward. The key to understand how the division continually pushed forward lies in understanding the “Steam Roller” concept, but also knowing when the division reached its culmination point in battle, as they did in Cassino.

There emerged a pattern of relief from the front line for rest and refit of approximately seventy-five days on the front line followed by three weeks of rest. Ultimately, this proved the right formula for the 34th Infantry Division to continue the fight. The combination of this rest and refit pattern with the “Steam Roller” allowed the division to continue the fight by pushing them forward, then allowing them to rest for the next drive. During their rest time, the stressing of continued training at the small unit level and integration of replacements into the group provided key components to continued success and further development of group cohesion. As stated, terrain dictated the fighting in Italy, but it led to the creation of a group cohesion that could not be broken. It was more than the forced living conditions that created group cohesion and the bond between the soldiers and their leaders; it was the whole complex body of an army’s thought. The

¹³⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter, 221-222.

strength of the individual soldiers, and their love for their comrades, created an unbreakable bond for the men of the 34th Infantry Division, to the detriment of the Germans.

CONCLUSION

The individual soldier is the fighting force of an army, but considerations for the morale of the soldier and organization must be part of operational planning. At first glance, it appears soldier morale was not a contributing factor for the decisions made by operational planners during the 34th Infantry's Italian Campaign. Conducting frontal attacks against well-defended, mountainous positions is neither creative nor conducive to maintaining soldier morale. However, reviewing each battle individually does illustrate that operational decisions made by planners did in fact allow the division to continue the fight during the entire campaign. Using the "Steam Roller" operating concept in conjunction with approximately seventy days on the front line, followed by three weeks of rest and refit, allowed the men of the 34th Infantry Division to sustain combat operations in Italy for 597 days.

For the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division, the development of strong group cohesion became the foundation for their success in the Italian Campaign. As the division sustained casualties during the campaign, the group carried the men through the battles. Maintaining the group strength not only fell to the soldiers themselves, but also the leaders of the division and the leaders actions and decisions. During the refit periods, the development of specific training regimes that forced veterans to train and integrate replacements, plus leader actions during combat provided a constant presence to the soldiers that their leaders cared for their men. Taken as a whole, all of this provided the essence of what became the group cohesion that maintained the morale of the men during intense sustained combat.

Looking to the future, operational planners cannot ignore soldier morale or experiences like the 34th Infantry Division's during the Second World War. Planners need to understand the implications of sustained combat on soldiers, and their leaders, and how it relates to a unit's

combat effectiveness. Even though units today deploy for a specified period, instead of an open-ended tour, that does not mitigate the fact soldiers are affected by sustained combat in as little as 15 days. Leaders too must understand their decisions when a soldier is not on the front line has lasting impact on their units' ability to continue the fight. Soldier morale matters, regardless of the differences of fighting in the mountains of Italy, or Afghanistan, or the streets of Baghdad.

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