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CASSINO

The Second, Third, and Fourth Battles

13 February - 18 May 1944

Offensive, Deliberate Attack, Mountain (Combined)

Opposing Forces: Allied: 15th Army Group
New Zealand Corps
2d New Zealand Division
4th Indian Division
2 Polish Corps
5th Kresowa Division
3d Carpathian Division
(Other Allied Divisions in supporting roles)

German: XIV Panzer Corps
90 Panzer Grenadier Division
LI Mountain Corps
1st Parachute Division
(Other German Divisions in supporting roles)

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23 May 1984

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ABSTRACT

COMMON REFERENCE: Cassino (February to May 1944)

TYPE OPERATION: Offensive, Deliberate Attack, Mountain
(Combined)

OPPOSING FORCES: Allied: 15th Army Group
New Zealand Corps
2d New Zealand Division
4th Indian Division
2 Polish Corps
5th Kresowa Division
3d Carpathian Division
(Other Allied Divisions in
supporting roles)
German: XIV Panzer Corps
90 Panzer Grenadier Division
LI Mountain Corps
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(Other German Divisions in
supporting roles)

SYNOPSIS: Following the failure of the US 34th Division assault on Monte Cassino, the provisional New Zealand Corps relieved the US forces. The New Zealand Corps, in the Second Battle of Cassino (February 15 - 18, 1944), conducted an assault, supported by aerial bombardment. The aerial bombardment destroyed the monastery, but the assault failed. The Third Battle of Cassino (March 15 - 23, 1944), also conducted by the New Zealand Corps, was supported by a tank assault and by the most massive close air support attack attempted to date in the war. The close air support destroyed the town of Cassino but the assaults failed. With Cassino blocking the road to Rome, Alexander regrouped his 15th Army Group, heavily weighted his main effort and launched a full-scale surprise assault between Cassino and the sea. The Fourth Battle of Cassino (May 11 - 18, 1944) was but a small action in this 15th Army Group Assault. The Poles took Cassino on 18 May 1944.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Table of Contents	11
List of Maps	111
I. Introduction	1
Source Data	2
II. The Strategic Setting.	7
General Considerations.	13
III. The Second Battle of Cassino.	23
A. Plans	30
B. Execution	34
C. Results/Conclusion.	45
IV. The Third Battle of Cassino.	48
A. The Battle.	52
B. Results/Conclusions	61
V. The Fourth Battle of Cassino.	64
The Battle.	69
VI. Significance of the Action	75
Episodes	85
Appendix I (Strategic Forces Available).	91
Appendix II (CARL Bibliography).	94

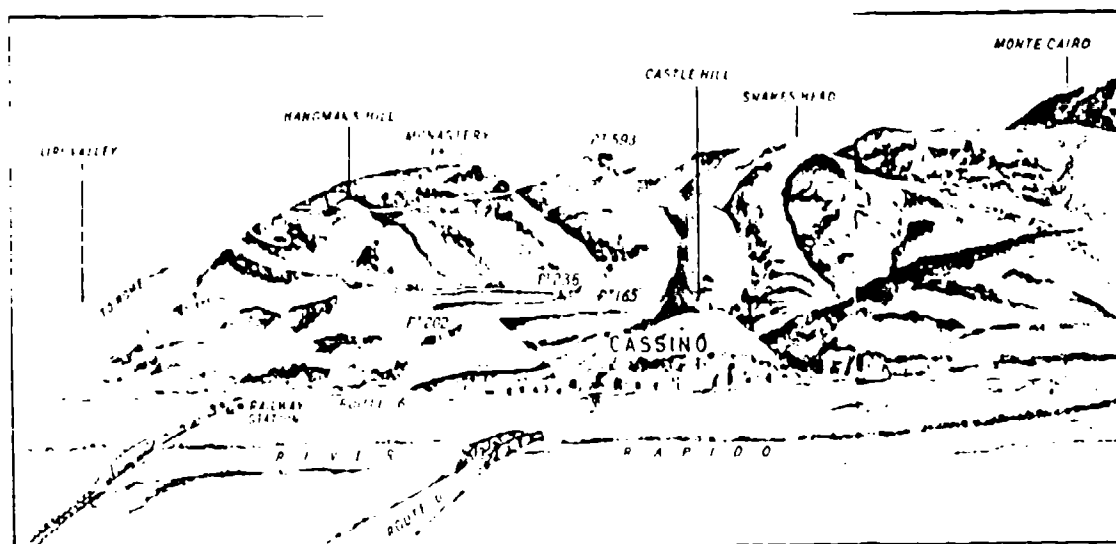
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LIST OF MAPS

Map 1 - -	Cassino's Strategic Setting	6
Map 2 - -	Winter Stalemate.	10
Map 3 - -	The Second Battle Setting	25
Map 4 - -	The Second Battle Plans	29
Map 5 - -	Mountain Battlefield	33
Map 6 - -	The Third Battle.	47
Map 7 - -	The Town of Cassino	50
Map 8 - -	The Fourth Battle	63
Map 9 - -	Anders' Plan of Attack.	68
Map 10 - -	The Capture of Cassino.	74



An artist's conception of
the Cassino battleground
J. F. Trotter

AFTER MAJ DALANY
P. 119.2

The Second, Third, and Fourth Battles of Cassino

Cassino, so costly in human life and suffering, ... was in the end little more than a victory of the human spirit; an elegy for the common soldier; a memorial to the definitive horror of war and the curiously perverse paradoxical nobility of battle. (1)

INTRODUCTION

The struggles which raged around the town and mountain of Cassino during the first five months of 1944 are collectively called "The Battle of Cassino." They could have been, but were not, called "The Cassino Campaign," for there were four distinct battles. In each of these assaults, the allies attempted to capture the town and mountain of Cassino and the Germans (no longer a combined German and Italian Axis) attempted to stop them.

The Battle of Cassino was one of the most controversial battles of the Second World War. Throughout history, battles which have been fought according to plan have received but cursory coverage unless they glorified some national leader. Controversial battles, on the other hand, have been intensively analyzed by many. Controversial

battles include those which failed to accomplish their objective, those which should never have been fought, those which should have been fought differently than they were, and those which took unnecessary and heavy casualties. Cassino is controversial in all of these points.

The Battle of Cassino has been intensively analyzed. The bombing of the monastery of Monte Cassino, an exercise in strategic air power only briefly touched in this paper, ensures that the name of Cassino will be long remembered. That bombing decision is not within our purview, for our analysis examines only the ground fighting at Cassino, a series of battles which are controversial enough in their own right.

While the Battle of Cassino appears to have been strategically insignificant to the outcome of the war, the capture of Cassino was politically significant. While the lessons of Cassino appear not to have been appreciated during the war, there are lessons which are applicable to the Army of today.

SOURCE DATA

The scope of this study begins after the completion of the first battle, analyzed by Major Curtis et alia in a CGSC battle analysis (2). The bombing of the monastery was the opening of the second battle. The decision to bomb, made

during the course of that first battle, is not analyzed in this paper.

Information is readily available on the second to fourth Cassino battles, but is more limited than that available for the first battle. The first battle was fought by American divisions, so American source data is readily available. The later battles were fought by allied divisions; their source documents are not as readily available as are the American documents. Only limited histories and operations orders for a few of the units are available in the Combined Arms Research Library (3).

Since the Battle of Cassino was so controversial, there are many books available to the researcher. These secondary sources were written about the battles several years after their occurrence^r. The books which cover the second through fourth battles are written primarily by officers who served in the Commonwealth or Polish divisions during World War II; most of these authors themselves fought at Cassino. Most of the books were written mainly as documentaries to either fuel the fire of controversy or to justify the necessity for the fight at Cassino. It can fairly be said that most of the authors "have an ax to grind." While some of the books are fairly straight forward accounts of the fighting, many make judgements and provide military and political assessments.

While the writers of many of the books question the necessity for ever fighting at Cassino, all agree on the

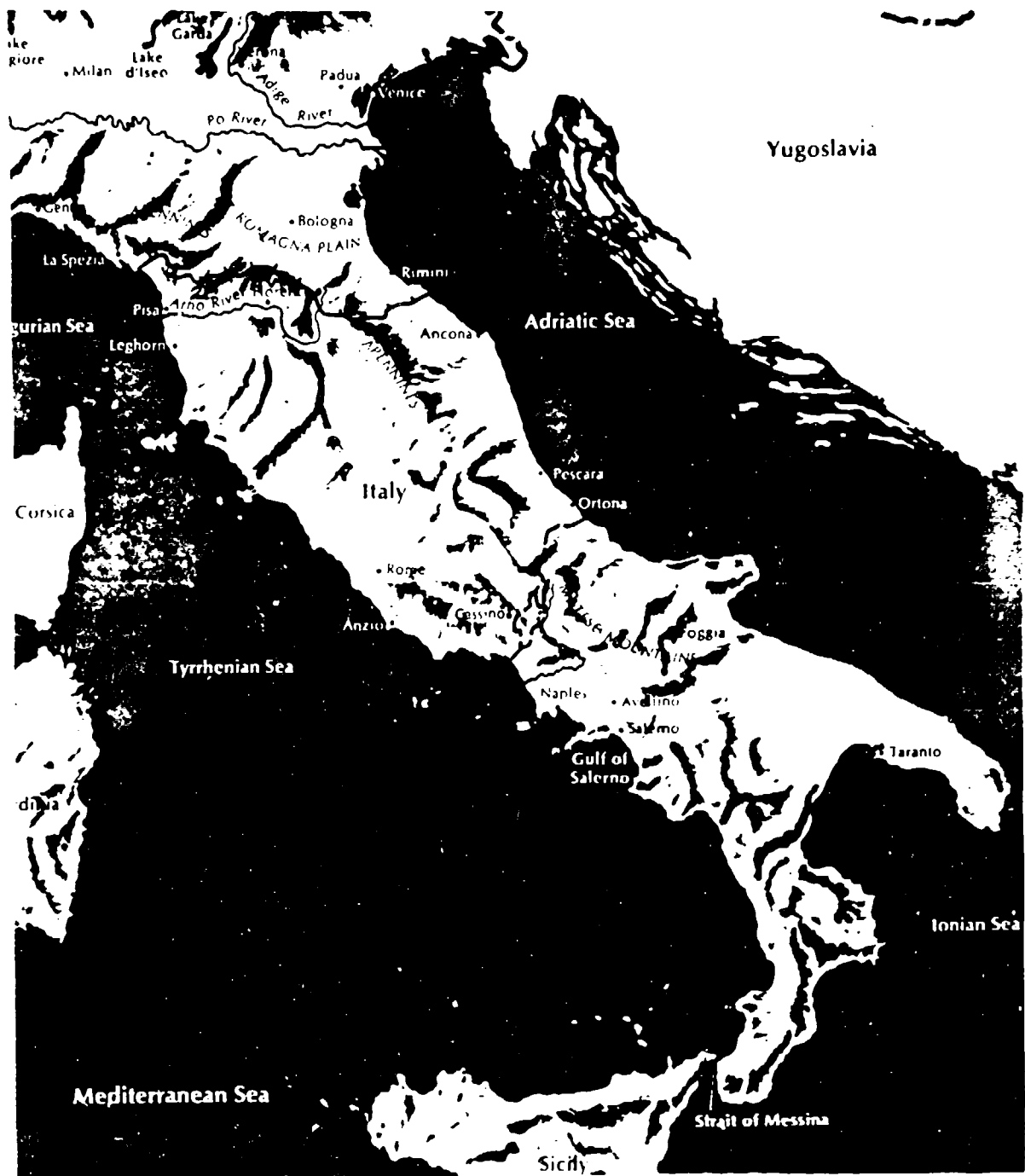
bravery of the combatants on both sides. The authors not only have a common assessment of Cassino, but they use the same sources (at least, those which acknowledge their sources cite common sources). The information available in these books is, therefore, largely redundant. Only the particular acts of heroism chosen to illustrate the fighting are different.

Books written about the Italian Campaign summarize the fighting around Cassino adequately for most purposes. Although the battle was fought by allied, as well as US, soldiers, the history of the US Army in World War II provides quite satisfactory coverage of the battle (4)(5). Those books written specifically about Cassino contain a wealth of detailed information, but most of it is repetitious. Where paragraphs of this study cite but one reference, there are usually three to five books which support the facts as reported. Somehow, the agonies of a New Zealand soldier fighting across mud and rubble seem much like the suffering of an American or Indian or Polish soldier fighting across the same or neighboring hill. In the end, it is hard to remember what is different between their accounts.

Perhaps one aspect of Cassino which has not been fully evaluated, and which will not be analyzed in this study, comes from the revelations about ULTRA. In the light of ULTRA information now known to have been available to the allied strategic commanders, one can only ask how able were

the generals who sent their men up the frigid muddy slopes to death? An unanswered, and now unanswerable question, is whether the replacement of US forces with British Commonwealth (New Zealand and Indian) forces was a purely political move by General Clark, a commander privy to ULTRA information on German troop locations.

CASSINO'S STRATEGIC SETTING



MAP 1

(6)

THE STRATEGIC SETTING

The Battle of Cassino was part of the Italian Campaign of World War II. (Map 1--Strategic Setting). The situation in Italy at the beginning of 1944, found the Germans entrenched in defensive positions within Italy, an occupied country which only shortly before had been their ally (6). Germany was on the defensive on all fronts and Hitler was determined to hold every foot of occupied territory. The German Army, under Field Marshal Kesselring (of the Luftwaffe), was dug in across Italy along the Gustav Line, the pivot of which was Cassino, held by the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division under General Baade (7). On a strategic defensive, the Germans could take only limited offensive action in Italy, but were determined to exact maximum penalties from the allies in Italy as they moved north (8).

During the second, third, and fourth battles of Cassino, the German army was opposed by the Allied 15th Army Group containing forces of Great Britain, New Zealand, India, Poland and France with US forces in reserve and support roles. Both sides were well trained, well led, and well equipped and included units already battle hardened in previous engagements. As exceptions to these generalizations, the allied forces had little recent training or experience in mountain warfare and both sides had localized supply problems.

By this time in the war, the allies had seized the strategic offensive. The allied rationale for invading Italy was to open a second front, or as the 15th Army Group commander, General Alexander, put it, the Italian Campaign was "a great holding attack" to siphon off German reserves and prevent their use in France and Russia (9). Political considerations among the allies played a major role in the strategy of the Italian campaign, for the capture of Rome prior to the invasion of France was deemed an essential political aim by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (10). He argued, as always, for peripheral attacks against the "soft underbelly of Europe" (11). The American Joint Chiefs reluctantly agreed to this British view, but approached the Italian campaign warily lest it begin to drain resources from the invasion of France. (In fact, the Americans placed the Italian campaign third in their list of priorities after Operation OVERLORD and Operation ANVIL.) These differing strategic mindsets would eventually doom the Italian campaign to a grinding war of attrition as landing craft and precious divisions were stripped from Alexander's forces to support higher priorities (12).

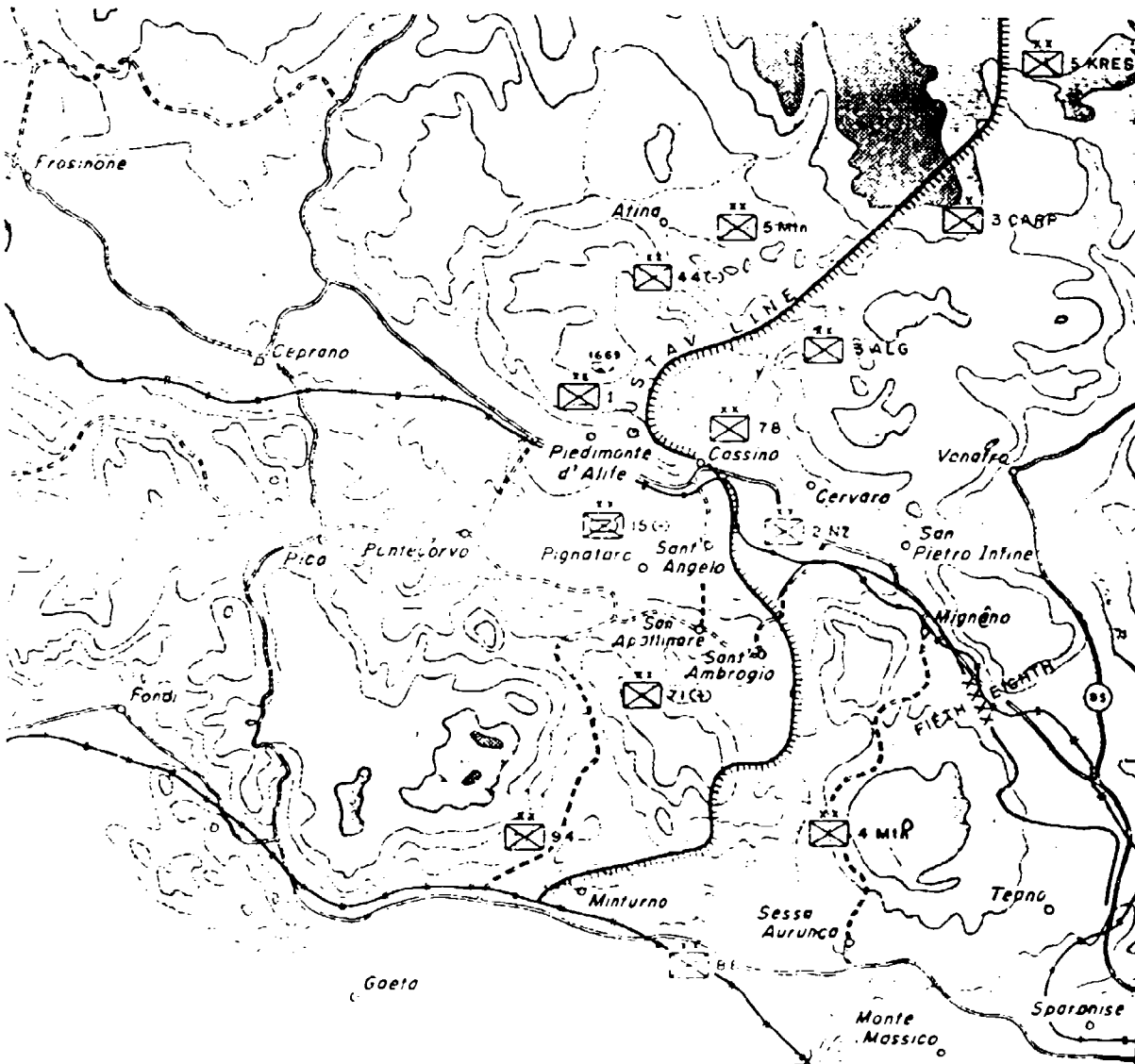
The Battle of Cassino cannot be seen in perspective without considering Operation SHINGLE, the landing at Anzio. The original allied decision to land near Rome was made on 8 November 1943. The original concept called for only a small landing with a linkup by Fifth Army, anticipated to have occupied forward positions at Frosinone by then. The

combined forces were then to drive north and capture Rome. Slow progress through the Bernhard Line defenses during 1943, and the approaching departure of most of the Italian theater's landing craft to support the OVERLORD and ANVIL landings, changed the concept (13).

Prime Minister Churchill had pushed hard for another amphibious landing since December 1943, and felt that the "stagnation" on the Italian front was "scandalous." The political considerations were extremely important to him, as the Italian theater would be the only one in which British (more properly, Commonwealth) forces would predominate after the buildup in France. Churchill firmly believed that Rome should not be sacrificed today for the French Riviera (Operation ANVIL) tomorrow (14).

The result of this political pressure for an amphibious landing south of Rome was that Operation SHINGLE came to be the focus of the Italian campaign rather than a supporting effort. As noted above, the Anzio landing originally was to take place when Fifth Army had reached Frosinone. This still had not happened by mid-January, so, to get the operation moving, the size of the landing force at Anzio was increased significantly from a reinforced division to the VI (US) Corps. Operation SHINGLE, which included the first attack on Cassino, was launched on 22 January 1944, ostensibly to break the stalemate at the Gustav Line and open the road to Rome. The Americans landed at Anzio even though Fifth Army was nowhere near Frosinone (15).

WINTER STALEMATE



Map 2 (16)

Thus, a strange reversal had taken place. Instead of the Anzio landing being supplementary to and conditional upon the advance of the main forces of Fifth Army, the allied attacks against the Gustav Line had to be maintained to hold the German reserves south of Rome and keep them away from the Anzio beachhead. The allies at Cassino thus had to keep attacking in the terrible Italian winter even though from an operational standpoint it would have been better to wait out the worst of the winter before attacking the Gustav line.

The Battle of Cassino took place near the town of Cassino, a key position on the Gustav line. (Map 2--Winter Stalemate). Cassino controlled access to the Liri Valley south of Rome by sitting astride Route 6, a major highway to the eternal city (17). Mountains in the area rise abruptly and offer mutually supporting positions to the defender. This was as evident to the defending Germans as it became to the attacking allies. Much of the attention of both sides was focused on Monastery Hill, a 1700 foot mountain, the site of Monte Cassino, mother abbey of the Benedictine order.

The fighting at Cassino, which proved to be the most grueling of any during the war in southern and western Europe, was ostensibly to open Route 6 to Rome. The battle up the face of Monte Cassino eventually came to be an end in itself for attacks had to be pressed all along the front in

an attempt to relieve pressure on the precarious Anzio beachhead (18).

The Battle of Cassino can be divided into four separate battles. The first battle, an adjunct to Operation SHINGLE, was conducted during the severe Italian winter from 17 January 1944, to 11 February 1944. (This battle was the subject of Major Curtis' 1983, Battle Analysis). The first Battle of Cassino consisted of attacks by the US 34th and 36th Infantry Divisions to secure the key terrain of Monte Cassino and the town of Cassino. These attacks was unsuccessful. The US 34th Infantry Division, under the II (US) Corps, a part of the US 5th Army commanded by General Mark Clark, crossed the Rapido River and mounted an uphill assault into a German infantry force of comparable strength occupying well fortified positions dug into Monte Cassino. On 11 February 1944, the first battle for Cassino ended with the final assault of the US divisions being repulsed. With two of its regiments already devastated by the Rapido River crossing fiasco, this repulse marked the end of the line for the US 36th Infantry Division and the II (US) Corps in the Cassino battles (19).

The second battle of Cassino (Operation AVENGER) occurred from 15 through 18 February 1944, with the allied assaults conducted by the New Zealand Corps under General Bernard Freyberg. The third battle (Operation DICKENS) occurred from 15 to 23 March 1944, and was once again conducted by the New Zealand Corps. Because the allied

combatants were unchanged, some authors refer to the second and third battles as a single long drawn-out battle of attrition with two assaults. The Germans, who changed combatants between the second and third battles, combined the first and second battles into one and called the third their "Second Battle of Cassino."

The fourth and final battle, a part of Operation DIADEM, occurred from 11 to 18 May 1944, and was conducted by the 13th (BR) Corps and the Free Polish forces (the 2 Polish Corps).

Under the 15th Army Group flag, the four battles of Cassino involved US, British, French, Indian, Polish and New Zealand troops (20). Enemy units were part of the German 10th Army and consisted of an elite parachute division, trained mountain troops and a number of Panzer Grenadier regiments (21). (See Appendix 1--Strategic Forces Available).

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

During all of the battles for Cassino, weather played a significant role. Generally speaking, it was cold, wet, and miserable until the fourth battle. The waterlogged Liri Valley, through which the allies had to maneuver, was in an almost continuous state of flood. The allies operating in this floodplain and on the sides of the mountain were exposed to the elements while the Germans, occupying

defensive positions, were somewhat sheltered from the ravages of weather. Sickness brought on by too much exposure to wet and cold claimed as many allied casualties as wounds (22). One author described the scene in the following manner:

"The battleground had been reduced to a universal grayness of a fortified mountain wasteland protected by a moat of mud, marsh and flood" (23).

During both the second and third battles, 2-wheel drive vehicles were useless. The wet weather restricted movement in the valley to men, mules, and the limited 4-wheel drive vehicles available. By reducing the more heavily mechanized allies to mule and foot mobile infantry, weather served an equalizing role which helped the defending Germans while limited visibility degraded allied air superiority (24).

All military aspects of terrain favored the German defender who took maximum advantage of time to further improve upon the numerous advantageous features already provided by nature. The Germans, occupying the high ground, had excellent observation of the allies, struggling through the flooded Liri valley within range of German artillery or attacking up the steep sides of Monastery Hill.

Preceding the first battle, the Germans had taken advantage of caves and depressions to build covered bunkers which blended into the hillsides. Additional weeks of preparation made these bunkers even stronger and better

concealed while bombardment contributed to disguising them (25). The allied aerial bombardment of the monastery preceeding the second battle produced incredibly convoluted ruins which the Germans then used to their maximum advantage. They had also evacuated the town of Cassino and rebuilt it into a series of strongpoints (26).

Besides producing hiding holes for dismounted German infantry to fight from, the allied bombardment added obstacles to the mud and rubble which dismounted the mechanized allies and made Cassino a fight between dismounted infantry. The Germans skillfully added mines and engineer obstacles to the natural and bombardment created obstacles, further slowing the allies (27).

As noted before, the Germans started the battle occupying the key terrain. Skillful fighters, they positioned their mutually supporting defensive positions to control all avenues of approach. Of course, from the beginning of the battle, their very occupation of Cassino controlled Route 6, the allied favored axis of advance on Rome. Just as it was the German occupation of strategic key terrain which, combined with the allied drive on Rome and attempts to relieve Anzio, caused the battle to be fought, so it was their occupation of tactical key terrain which controlled the avenues of approach and made the allied attacks fail.

The second battle for Cassino was fought between the New Zealand Corps (an element of the Allied 5th Army) and

the German XIV Panzer Corps. While German World War II Panzer Divisions were combined arms divisions, by this time in the Italian campaign, the XIV Panzer Corps was Panzer in name only; it had been reduced to infantry (Panzer Grenadier) and mountain troops with only a handful of armored vehicles.

The Allied 5th Army was fighting on a broad front. The allied forces available on the Cassino massif as of 15 February 1944, were the New Zealand Corps, consisting of the 2d New Zealand Division and the 4th Indian Division supported by the US II Corps Artillery (28). A French Expeditionary Corps and elements of the II (US) Corps (recently relieved at Cassino) played no significant part in the second battle.

After the bloody, costly failure of the American 34th and 36th Divisions to secure a breakthrough at Cassino, it fell to the allied divisions to assume the responsibility for achieving the breakthrough. With the failure and withdrawal of the American units, the 4th Indian Division and 2nd New Zealand Divisions, originally intended to form the exploitation forces to follow the successes of II (US) Corps, had been hastily thrown together in the form of a temporary New Zealand Corps (29). Their mission upon commitment was to breakout into the Liri Valley and also to capture Cassino. As will be seen, these missions became mutually exclusive in light of the existing weather, terrain, supply status and enemy dispositions. Similarly

the timing of this second phase battle for Cassino was heavily influenced by the operational goal of conducting actions to take pressures off of the Anzio beachhead. Time did not allow for the adequate accumulation of forces and material to accomplish the mission.

The New Zealand Corps relieved the 11 (US) Corps in the Cassino sector between 12 and 15 February 1944. They came into the battle at full strength, lacking only grenades and mortar cartridges.

Facing the New Zealand Corps were elements of the German XIV Panzer Corps consisting of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, the 44th Hoch and Deutschmeister Infantry Division, and the 5th Mountain Division. The 90th Panzer Grenadier Division took the brunt of the fighting at Cassino during both the first and second battles (30).

The second battle was fought by opposing forces which were relatively equal in strength. The allies had air superiority which they failed to use effectively at Cassino because of commitments at Anzio and because the aircraft which they were using were not suited to the task at Cassino. The allied clear superiority in tanks was negated by the mud which restricted tanks to roads, by the German use of obstacles, and by German control of avenues of approach. The Germans occupied well-prepared positions on very defensible terrain from which they were able to use

machine guns, mortars, and grenades to their advantage in the conduct of the defense.

The allies possessed a technological advantage in terms of airpower and tanks. Two significant attempts were made to capitalize on the airpower advantage. Prior to the second battle the allies used strategic bombers to drop about 600 tons of bombs on the monastery (31). This effort marked the first time in the war that strategic bombers were used in a tactical role in support of ground troops. Prior to the third battle, a similar strategic bombing destroyed the town of Cassino. As observers watched Cassino being levelled in the bombing attack, they were quite confident that no German defenders would survive. Their confidence was shortlived; however, as the Germans repulsed each allied attack.

To a certain extent, the bombing negated the allied advantage in tanks. In the second battle, tanks were held in reserve to exploit the success of the infantry. But the terrain, rainy weather, and rubble from the bombing all combined to prevent the most effective use of tanks. Narrow roads and huge craters did not allow the tanks to work in conjunction with the infantry.

During the course of the three battles the Germans made very effective use of mortars, which they used to attack targets in ravines, on reverse slopes and behind walls. The terrain and allied reliance on heavier guns made precision gunnery against similar German targets more difficult.

German units in Cassino were supplied primarily by trucks from 10th Army supply bases near Frasinone or Aquila-Sulmona, located approximately forty kilometers northwest and eighty kilometers north of Cassino respectively. Rail lines from northern Italy to these bases were often interdicted by allied aircraft. Although damaged rail lines were quickly repaired, the Germans relied primarily on trucks, operating at night, for resupply. If daylight movement was required the Germans used sometimes very circuitous routes on secondary roads.

Although supply economy was necessary, adequate supply was not a limiting factor for the Germans. Defensive positions had been prestocked with adequate food, water and ammunition. Stocks were replenished during lulls in fighting. Weapons losses were often compensated for by using Italian weapons. Artillery weapons were repaired at shops set up very close to the front.

Allied supplies were sufficient down to corps level. However, difficulties existed in getting supplies to units below division level. Supplies were particularly critical for units fighting in the mountains above the town of Cassino. Vehicles could not negotiate narrow mountain trails so men and mules had to carry supplies up the side of the mountain. These resupply parties were often interdicted by German machine gun and mortar fire. During the third battle, units located on isolated positions such as on Hangman's Hill (Point 435) had to be resupplied by air.

Quite often, air-dropped containers rolled down the mountain side into German hands. Inadequate routes to forward positions also hampered efforts to provide medical support and to evacuate casualties.

Allied inability to supply the units in the mountains adversely affected the tactical operations of these units. Of particular note was the fact that a lack of grenades in the second battle, a deficiency directly attributable to the difficult resupply situation, severely hampered the tactical effectiveness of those units and finally caused the Commonwealth forces to abandon the battle.

During the course of the three battles there was often very little command and control between brigade level and platoons. Most of the fighting was done by company, platoon, or squad elements. Units became intermingled. Individual initiative was the key to achieving tactical success.

Allied intelligence efforts (below the ULTRA strategic level) suffered prior to both the second and fourth battles as the newly arrived units did not have sufficient time to send out patrols to determine German positions. At company level, allied units had a very poor knowledge of German defensive positions and were continually surprised by effective fire coming from well-camouflaged locations. On the other side, the Germans had excellent tactical intelligence on allied positions (to include artillery

locations) even though their strategic intelligence and order of battle intelligence were defective.

The German defensive effort was conducted from positions that took months to prepare and were designed in detail with great attention given to gun positions and lines of fire. Vigorous counterattacks with accurate mortar and artillery fire were used to quickly recapture ground lost to the allies. Mines and obstacles were effectively used to restrict allied movements. Reinforcements were moved quickly from position to position in response to allied efforts. Although the terrain around Cassino was inherently very defensible, the Germans did an excellent job of creating a defensive system that was virtually impregnable (32).

In general, the allied troops had excellent physical condition and morale, although the New Zealand Corps was in much better condition for the second battle than for the third. Since the allied forces changed during the three battles, the specific condition of the allies will be addressed in each battle's discussion. The Germans of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division had been mauled in the first battle of Cassino, but were still tough fighters and held the dominant terrain. Well prepared defensive plans contributed to the morale of the German defenders.

Because of the nature of the battles, effective leadership was most often displayed by small-unit leaders. Small groups, often isolated from their normal command and

control elements, took the initiative to seize a key position. Counterattacks began immediately as a result of small-unit initiative. At this lower level of leadership, both sides had numerous incidents of courage and bravery.



United Press Photo

Smoke rises from the town of Cassino during shelling by Fifth Army artillery in February 1944, shortly before the bombing of the Monastery, which can be seen atop Monastery Hill in the background. Castle Hill is at right.

*AFTER
MAJDALENI
p 119c*

THE SECOND BATTLE
(15 to 18 February 1944)

The second Battle for Cassino was begun on 15 February 1944, only three days after the failure of the first battle. The staff for the New Zealand Corps was formed just prior to the attack which initiated the second battle. Members of this staff were taken largely from the 2nd New Zealand Division and had very little opportunity to settle in and work together as members of a corps staff. Their removal from the 2d New Zealand Division left that division with a depleted staff.

An essential part of the New Zealand approach was to use massive bombing and artillery preparation prior to the assault. This technique failed because the Germans were well dug-in and because of poor air-ground coordination. The bombing of the monastery was conducted before the ground troops were ready so the ground assault occurred too late to capitalize on any advantage from the effects of the bombing.

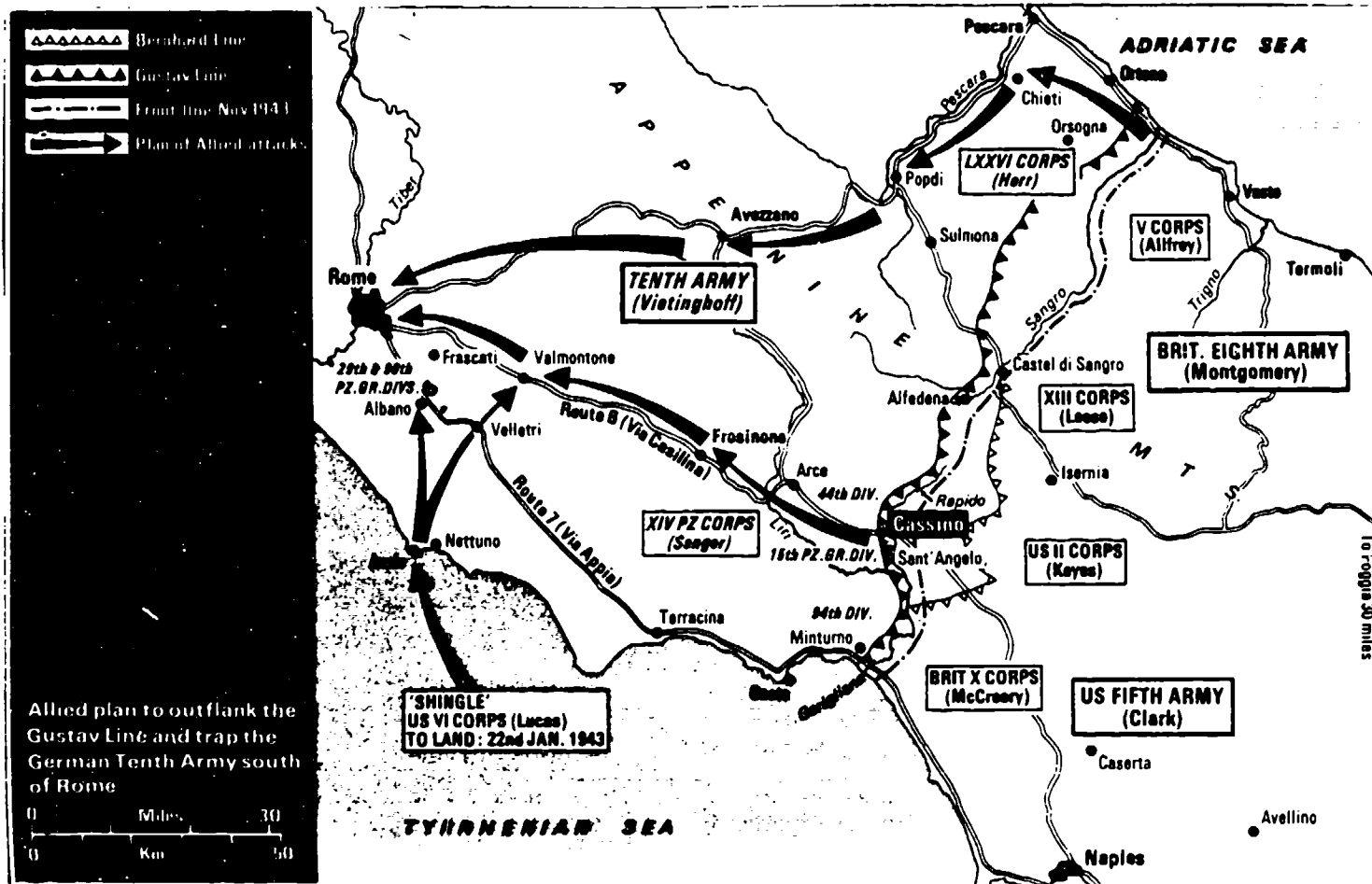
Lt Gen Sir Bernard C. Freyberg, while experienced and possessing an excellent reputation, was untried as a corps commander, having spent most of his time as a division commander. Freyberg was characterized as strong-minded, aggressive, energetic, and optimistic. He was concerned about the welfare of his soldiers and wary about needless loss of life.

The real leadership and staff weakness of the New Zealand Corps lay at the division level. 2d New Zealand Division had a new commander and a largely new staff at the beginning of the second battle. (The New Zealand Corps staff had been formed from 2d New Zealand Division key personnel). This turmoil and inexperience at the highest level provided very little inspiration or guidance for lower level units. Piecemeal commitment of units and poor coordination of unit actions probably resulted in part from inexperienced leaders at division and corps level (33).

The New Zealand Corps was unfamiliar with the type of mountain and urban fighting required in the Cassino sector. Past experience had not prepared the corps for this type of combat and there was no time to train before the attack on 15 February. Once committed, units were more concerned with survival against the elements and the enemy than with training. The New Zealand Corps arrived unprepared for this type of fighting, was committed too quickly to battle and was forced to hang on to positions until exhaustion forced eventual withdrawal. With so little time available before their first battle, the New Zealand Corps attempted to follow the American tactics that had very nearly succeeded in the first battle for Cassino.

The commander of the newly formed New Zealand Corps, General Freyberg, chose a course of action dictated by the promise of aerial bombardment. The ability to destroy defenses through aerial bombardment had not been proven--it

THE SECOND BATTLE SETTING



Map 3 (34)

was a new theory (35). Under circumstances that would try an experienced corps staff, Freyberg's staff was new to corps work, unfamiliar with each other, and painfully inexperienced. As if this were not enough, the first battle for Cassino ended on 12 February 1944, and the new unit and new staff started the second battle for Cassino on 15 February 1944 (36). Time was not an ally of the newly created New Zealand Corps.

The course of action settled upon by General Freyberg and his staff was feasible--all things considered. The New Zealand Corps had only two divisions--the 2d New Zealand and the 4th Indian Division. They would follow the basic plan the Americans had used in the abortive first battle of Cassino with one major addition--the promised support of the Air Forces. The Air Forces were to pave the way, it was thought, so these divisions could achieve victory with minimum casualties. The use of airpower was to make up for the lack of adequate planning time. Besides, it was asked--what defenses could remain after the 15th Army Group Air Force had unleashed its bomber, fighter and fighter-bombers on the one mile square fortress of Cassino (37)?

The plan for General Freyberg's two divisions to conduct a giant pincer movement. (See Map 3). The Fourth Indian Division was to gain the high ground, attack through the salient which had been held by the 34th Division, move from the northeast to capture Monastery Hill and the Abbey

upon it. At the same time, to the south of the town, the New Zealand Division was to secure a bridgehead over the Rapido River and then link up with the Indian Division at the foot of Monastery Hill. Following the capture of Cassino and clearing of Route 6, a mobile force (Combat Command B of the US 1st Armor Division, held in reserve) would be launched up Route 6 to Rome (38).

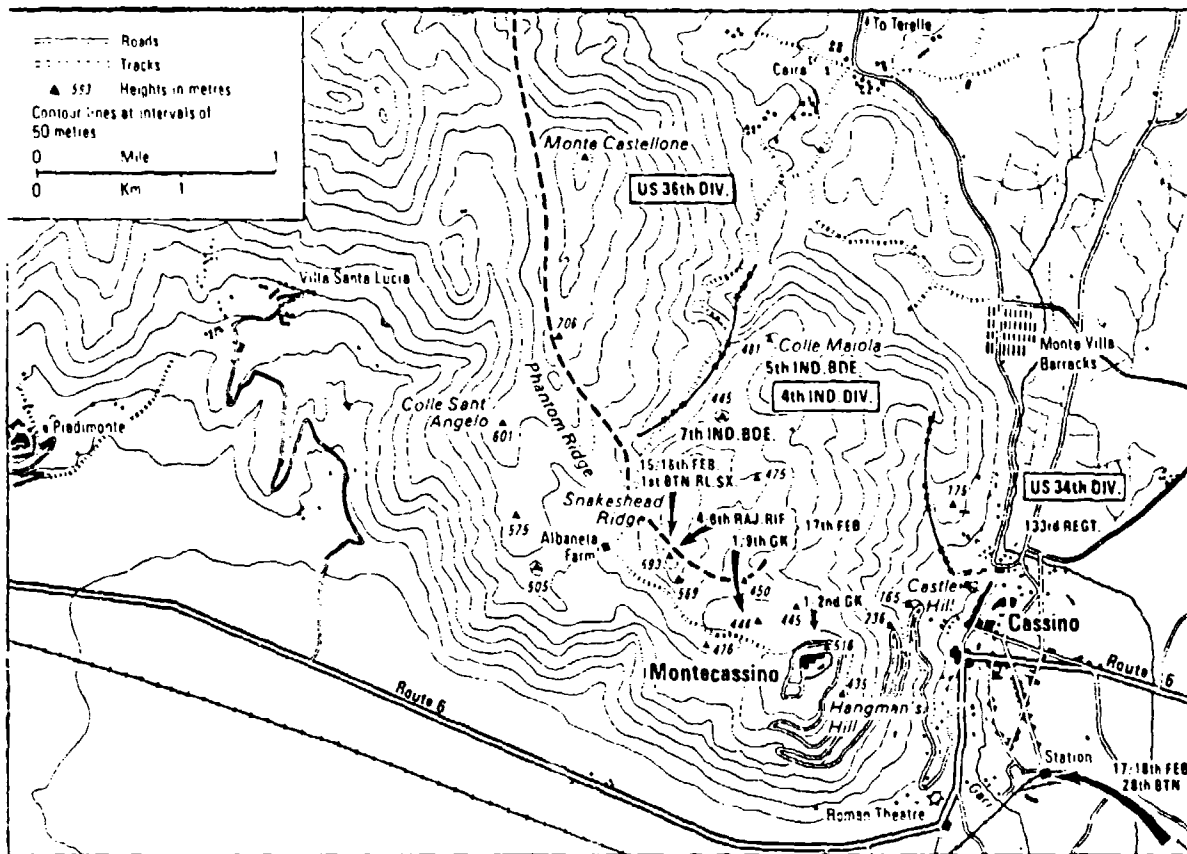
The over confidence in the untested Air Force was so prevalent that it was felt that the Cassino mission would take only a short time. After bombing Monte Cassino, it was thought the air forces could concentrate their full support over the threatened Anzio beachhead. This army overconfidence and inexperience was illustrated in the fact that the Fifth Army did not even think about telling Freyberg of the bombing until too late for his staff to coordinate the bombing at Cassino with the ground attacks of the two divisions of New Zealand troops. As it happened, the coordination was not made and the positive effects of the bombing were not exploited, for the ground troops were not ready to attack at the same time as the air strike was made against Monte Cassino (39).

Additionally, the issue of the Monastery of Cassino itself bears mentioning. A building of tremendous historical significance, it sat atop Monastery Hill, totally dominating the terrain for miles around, and overlooking the approach to the Liri Valley and Highway 6. Whether the German troops actually occupied the monastery or merely the

hills and terrain upon which it sat, has been debated since the battles. The question of the actual location of German troops is of historical significance, but the belief of the allies that the Germans were in the monastery is key to whether the destruction of the monastery was justified. In terms of the mission given to the New Zealand Corps, (i.e. to capture Cassino) and in view of the pressure for mounting the offensive in support of Anzio, there seem to have been few alternatives to the allied forces other than an immediate attack.

Physical condition and morale on the allied side were excellent prior to the second battle. Both the New Zealand and Indian Divisions had excellent fighting reputations earned in battles in North Africa. The New Zealand Division had very good esprit de corps and possessed a feeling of being elite. The Indian Division had a proud tradition and was very professional. However, neither division was trained in mountain warfare.

THE SECOND BATTLE PLANS



The torch is passed, but 4th Indian Division makes little progress towards Montecassino (15th/17th February)

Map 4 (40)

PLANS

The plans for the second battle of Cassino were not much different from the attempts made earlier by the US II Corps. (See Map 4). Essentially, the attack consisted of a pincer movement with the 4th Indian Division attacking the Monastery Hill from the rear (the North) and the 2nd New Zealand Division attacking in a westward direction across the Rapido River at the base of the hill seeking to break through into the Liri Valley (41).

The efforts of the American Divisions had gained a foothold (although far less secure than the New Zealand Corps was led to believe) along the high ground northwest of the monastery, along terrain which has become known as Snakeshead Ridge. After successfully seizing the monastery, the 4th Indian Division was to continue down the hill to secure Highway 6 (42).

The monastery, whether occupied in force by enemy soldiers or merely by observers was in such a commanding position that it was the opinion of the New Zealand Corps that it must be neutralized if the attack were to succeed (43). The experiences of the American Divisions attested to this fact.

It was decided that the only way in which to accomplish this was through the use of heavy bombers. Controversy over the bombing of the monastery existed then and continues to this day; however, the bombing of the monastery was indeed

incorporated into the fire plan of the 4th Indian Division (44).

Concurrently with the attack by the 4th Indian Division, the 2nd New Zealand Division would attack along the railway causeway, seize the railway station and subsequently capture the Roman Theater in the vicinity of the westward turn of Highway 6 into the Liri Valley. Success would afford the opportunity to the tanks of the 1st US Armored Division to drive into the Liri Valley and up Highway 6. The capture of the railway station was seen as key for it would allow the improvement of the railroad causeway and provide a conduit for following tank forces. The plan for the New Zealanders to link up with the 4th Indian Division along Highway 6, would, if successful, cut off and isolate the defenders of the town of Cassino itself. Even if the 4th Indian Division attack failed to capture the monastery and sweep down to Highway 6, the capture of the railway station and the subsequent capture of the road junction and area around the Roman Theater would essentially open the Liri Valley to the allies (although leaving them subject to observation and indirect fire) (45).

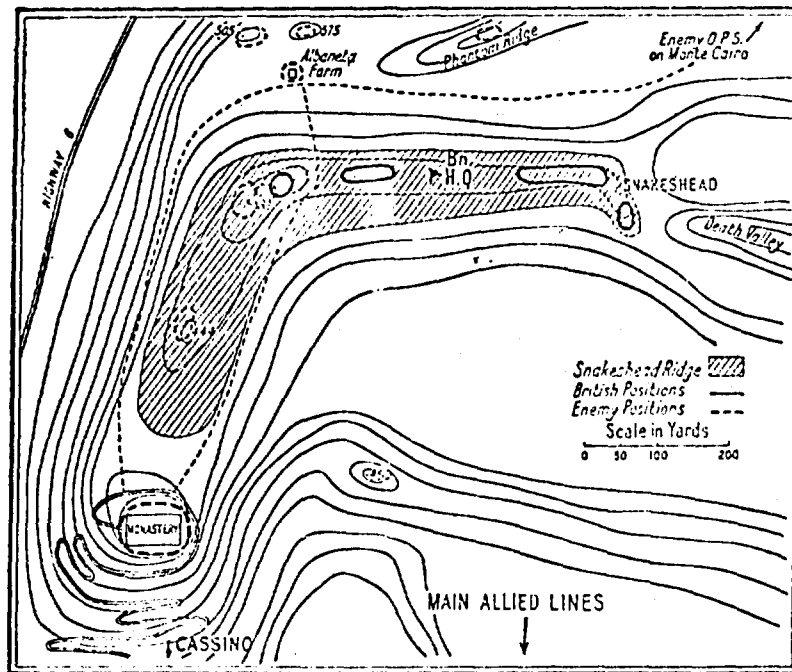
While this plan had its share of risk, it appeared to be the one with the most chance of success. The Germans had flooded the river valleys and to attempt actions across these flooded lowlands would likely result in as little and costly success as had the American river crossing operation (46). Nevertheless, this plan was not without its own

risks. There had been sufficient time for the enemy to create significant obstacles along the railroad embankment, to have blown the bridge over the Rapido and to have emplaced 11 other imaginative obstacles along the route. (See Map 5). The key to the success would be the rapid and effective overcoming of these obstacles, and yet advance along such a narrow avenue would subject the attack to delay if the obstacles were not breached in a timely manner.

MOUNTAIN BATTLEFIELD

THE SECOND BATTLE

161



MOUNTAIN BATTLEFIELD

Snakeshead Ridge, mountain approach to Monastery Hill. Seventy yards separated forward troops of both sides here. American, British, Indian and Polish infantry who successively occupied Snakeshead had to be maintained by mules and porters making round journeys of 14 miles each night. Allied positions were overlooked by enemy from three sides.

Map 5 (47)

EXECUTION

Beginning with the relief of the American units on Snakeshead Ridge, the 4th Indian Division encountered great difficulties. Contrary to the unit location information provided by the American headquarters, the 4th Indian Division found the realities of the situation on the ground to be quite different and significantly less advantageous. Expecting Point 593 (Cavalry Mount), a dominant height along Snakeshead Ridge, to be in American hands and to form a secure startpoint from which to launch their attack toward the monastery, the 4th Indian Division found it to be in German hands (48). The Indians had to bitterly fight to capture Point 593 and the ruins of a medieval fort upon its heights. Furthermore, the Indians found that the existing American positions were little more than forward outposts and the build-up of the supplies with which to begin the attack would have to be made over treacherous mountain trails unsuitable for vehicles. Logistics became dependent upon mule trains to traverse the seven miles distance from the allied front to the supply trains (49). This was a slow, laborious process which left the Division critically short of vital ammunition supplies (notably mortars and grenades) with which to launch an attack against a determined enemy holding dominating terrain (50). The attack of the Division was to be further hampered by the

untimely loss to serious illness of its commander, General Tucker (51).

The relief of the forward American units on the Ridge began on 11 February 1944, but, in view of the difficulties already mentioned, was not completed until the early morning of 14 February. It would require another two days until the second brigade of the 4th Division (the 7th brigade) would be in position behind the first (the 5th Brigade) (52). Originally, General Freyberg had no intention of rushing the offensive, since he was aware of the difficulties being encountered by both the 2nd New Zealand and the 4th Indian Divisions. His intentions to allow adequate time (i.e. the 16th of February) for logistical buildup and preparation were, however, foreshortened by the pressures being generated by the status of the beachhead at Anzio (53). By the 14th of February, intelligence expected a major counteroffensive by the Germans at Anzio (54). The allied high command saw a pressing need to initiate immediate action along the Gustav line to inhibit the German capabilities at Anzio. The agreed upon air support for the bombing of the monastery began to be driven by the exigencies of Anzio and not by the tactical conditions at Cassino. Thus the possibility existed that Cassino would be bombed in accordance with Air Force aircraft constraints, but that the 2d New Zealand Corps would not be able to immediately exploit the shock effect of bombing (a key ingredient of Freyberg's argument for the bombing of the

monastery) (55). In fact, when the weather forecasts for the 15th of February projected acceptable weather, the combination of good weather and the anticipated need of air support at Anzio in the immediate future dictated that the air missions over Cassino be flown on that day (56). Thus the date was set notwithstanding the fact that tactically the 2nd New Zealand Corps (particularly the Indian Division) was not yet prepared. The bombing began at 0930 on the 15th and came as a surprise as much to the allied units on the ground as to the Germans (57). While it proved to be a spectacular display, there was not much time for observation. With the bombing underway, the surprised chain of command had to begin to feverishly alter the original plans for attack in order to exploit as quickly as possible the shock effect of the bombing (58).

Originally the concept of the operation for the 4th Indian Division envisioned the forward establishment of its 7th Brigade as a combination base and assault force, through which would successively funnel first its own battalions followed by those of the 5th Brigade. The 11th Brigade, would, due to the terrain situation (i.e. extremely narrow front and tortuous supply LOC's) be utilized in the role of porters to insure adequate supply of the 7th and 5th Brigades (59).

The view of the battlefield and consequently the concept of the operation in the eyes of the 7th Brigade dictated that hill 593 would have to be secured before any

further movement onto the monastery proper would be feasible. (See Map 5). Point 593 was in fact solidly held by the German troops and was well covered by fire from supporting positions on adjoining terrain. In order to exploit the bombing of the monastery, the 7th Brigade had to attack as soon as possible. However, since the hills offered such dominating observation a daylight attack appeared to be a fruitless endeavor and the allies chose a night attack. With this time lag between the bombing and the ground attack the Germans were able to overcome the impact of the bombing. Further, because the German positions on Point 593 were dangerously close to the 7th Brigade position (as close as 70 yards) allied artillery support for the attack was not feasible (60).

Since the previous days had been spent primarily finding and reoccupying American positions and methodically building their own logistic support there was precious little time for 7th Brigade troops to conduct active patrolling and reconnaissance of the enemy positions. Because of the uncertainty of exact enemy dispositions and the narrow, hard, and rocky terrain which made stealth in movement virtually impossible, the 7th Brigade's lead battalion (the 1st Royal Sussex) decided to attack on the night of 15 February on a one company (actually two platoon) front. After moving only 50 yards toward Point 593, these elements encountered heavy machine gun fire coupled with effective grenade usage which halted the attack in its

tracks and frustrated every effort to maneuver and gain point 593. The night ended with the withdrawal of the company. Close support weapons (i.e. grenades) available to the 7th Brigade were of insufficient quantity, even though the grenades of the following units were collected and passed to the lead elements in contact. Again the dominating observation offered by the terrain left the battalion no choice but to withdraw so as not to be trapped in untenable positions with the coming of daylight (61).

The morning of the 16th brought both the news that the German counteroffensive had begun at Anzio and the order to resume efforts to seize the monastery again that night. In light of the previous night's unsuccessful attack, the new plan was to conduct main and supporting attacks on point 593 with a reinforced company (B Company (+)) on the south side of Point 593 and a company minus (A Company (-)) on the north side. A third company (D Company) loaded with ammunition would rush forward upon seizure of Point 593 helping to consolidate the hill and repulse the expected counter attack. The battalion reserve would consist of the remnants of C Company depleted which had made the first attack on the previous night (62).

The need for close support weapons had become patently obvious in the first attack, and an emergency requisition for grenades was made early on the 16th. In fact, the attack was delayed several times that night in anticipation of grenades arriving by mule train. When the attack began

at midnight of 16 February, the number of grenades which had arrived was only half the number requested (63).

Since artillery preparation of 593 could not be used again due to the proximity of the friendly forces to the objective, artillery would neutralize the adjacent hill positions which supported 593. Hill 575 was one such position, but placing effective fire upon it posed its own problems. In order to target 575 from the artillery positions in the valley, some 1500 feet below, the shells had to traverse the ridgeline leading from the 7th Brigade positions to point 593. Since the attack route along Snakeshead Ridge was only several meters lower than Point 575, the shells would barely clear the heads of the attacking Indians. Errors in elevation could be costly, and in fact proved to be just that, as short rounds fell amid friendly troops (64).

As the attacking formations began to assemble along their line of departure, some friendly artillery fire intended for Point 575 impacted along the Snakeshead ridge and produced friendly casualties among the two leading companies. After a hurried reorganization, the attack proceeded. As on the previous night, it was stalled by machine gun fire after advancing approximately 50 yards. The force making the supporting attack encountered two deep and precipitous crevices not shown on their maps (and unknown due to their having no time to conduct reconnaissance). Unable to proceed further, they were

relegated to providing supporting fire only. The main attack force maneuvered under fire and succeeded in attaining a foothold on point 593, but was unable to dislodge the determined enemy from their prepared positions even with hand to hand combat. With the supporting attack force taking heavy casualties, the reserve force (Company C (-)) was committed in a reinforcing role to Company A. Similarly, with the main attack running out of ammunition and momentum, Company C was committed in an attempt to turn the tide. However, they too were halted both by the crevices encountered by Company A and by withering cross fire. As on the night of the 15th the attack failed. Inadequate quantities of grenades contributed in no small measure to this failure. The two unsuccessful attacks had cost the lead battalion (1st Royal Sussex Battalion) 12 of 15 officers and 162 out of 313 men, and rendered it combat ineffective (65).

With the 1st Royal Sussex Battalion no longer effective, and Monastery Hill and the surrounding terrain still firmly in German hands, another attack was planned for the night of 17 February 1944. This plan called for another battalion of the 9th Brigade, the 4th Battalion of the 6th Rajputana Rifles, to pass through the decimated 1st Royal Sussex Battalion and take point 593. The remnants of the 1st Royal Sussex would follow up and continue westward along the ridge to capture hill 444. This action was to begin at 172400 hours and would be followed at 180215 by two other

battalions in a direct assault across the slopes and ravines upon the monastery. These two battalions, the 1st of the 2nd and the 1st of the 9th Gurkhas, would have a difficult and treacherous route, but were felt to be the best suited for this due to their Himilayan background. The 4th Division's two reserve battalions were given the portage mission to insure adequate ammunition and supply support of the attacks (66).

Simultaneously with the 4th Division attack on Point 593 and Monastery Hill, the 2d New Zealand Division in the valley would send the 28th (Maori) Battalion along the railroad embankment to capture the railroad station. Following closely behind the 28th Battalion would be a company of sappers to neutralize the 12 obstacles which the Germans had executed along the embankment route. The engineer tasks were critical so that tanks and anti-tank guns could link up with and support the leading infantry by daylight of the 18th. Thus the erection of bridges across both the Rapido and a canal were deemed critical, since to expect the leading infantry to hold the railroad station throughout the next day without tank and anti-tank support would be inviting disaster. The combination of weather and German flooding of the valleys forced the allies to accept the restrictive approach along a narrow front, prone to bottlenecks (67).

The attack of the 4th Battalion of the 6th Rajputana Rifles along Snakeshead Ridge to capture point 593 met a

fate similar to the attacks of the previous two nights. The two Gurkha battalions moved out toward Monastery Hill with the 1st of the 9th Gurkhas immediately to the left (south) of the 4th Battalion of the 6th Rifles and the 1st of the 2nd Gurkhas to their left. Both encountered rough going, the 1st of the 9th Gurkhas being pinned down by fires from point 593 and the supporting hills. The 1st of the 2d Gurkhas headed for Monastery Hill along an axis which would traverse hill 450. (See Maps 4 and 5). They moved relatively unopposed until they reached the ravine at the bottom of the northern slope of Monastery Hill where a belt of scrub vegetation awaited them. Nearing this vegetation they came under an intense grenade attack and dashed forward for the anticipated shelter of this vegetation line, only to find that it was in actuality a thorn thicket, ingeniously interwoven with barbed wire, and booby trapped with anti-personnel mines. This obstacle was effectively covered with flanking and slightly rearward machine gun fire. With the flashes produced by exploding anti-personnel mines pointing the way, the Gurkhas were easy targets to the German flanking fire. The lead elements of the battalion were decimated and the virtual curtain of machine gun fire coming from the slope of Monastery Hill prevented the following companies of the battalion from making any further headway. As had occurred before, the attack along Snakeshead Ridge met with fierce defenders and, notwithstanding the efforts of the attackers, was stymied. The only difference between

this attack and those preceeding it was that the forces which met defeat were three battalions instead of the one company or one battalion which had previously been repulsed there (68).

While this sequence was occurring above the valley floor, the 2nd New Zealand Division, lead by the 28th (Maori) Infantry Battalion, attempted to advance along the railway embankment to seize the railway station, and key terrain slightly beyond (the roundhouse and a hillock). Scheduled for 2130 hours on 17 February 1944, the attack of the 28th Infantry Battalion was to proceed from the Rapido line with A and B Companies leading the main attack and a diversionary attack being made toward the town. At H+10 the artillery preparation lifted and priority of fire switched to counterbattery fires and engagement of flank targets. The lead companies soon ran into uncleared mine fields and took heavy mortar fire, which caused the advance to take longer than expected. By approximately 2400 hours the station had been overrun by B Company and numerous prisoners taken, but because A Company was delayed along a heavily protected tributary of the Gari and was unable to capture the roundhouse and hillock, B Company was unable to seize its secondary objective, a cluster of houses northwest of the station. The situation remained unchanged throughout the night (69).

The key to the success of this attack lay not only with the success of the leading infantry battalion but with the

rapid success of the engineers in overcoming the numerous obstacles emplaced along the causeway and opening it for the remainder of the Division as well as the follow-on tanks of the 1st US Armored Division. The engineers had a difficult and tight schedule to meet at best. They were further impeded by the early delays which were encountered by the tactical forces. These delays began with shelling during the building of the bridge over the line of departure/line of contact over the Rapido, as well as the confusion caused in the passage of the 28th as it moved forward into its start positions. Instead of being ready at 2100 hours, the bridge was first ready at 2315 and it was not until 180500 that the main bridge was completed. By leap frogging elements the engineers cleared mines, booby traps, and the demolished rail line, bridged the wet gaps of the Rapido and a canal, and bridged dry gaps in the embankment. In total, they created nearly one mile of pathway for the following tank and anti-tank forces (70). Yet by first light the engineers had fallen short of the objective, since obstacles 11 and 12, both dry gaps, were yet to be overcome. With the break of day, the engineers were not ordered to continue, and the infantry holding the station were told they would have to hold until darkness of the coming night would enable the reinitiation of the engineer effort (71). With the station area exposed to the commanding observation of Monastery Hill only 500 yards to the west, the decision was made to lay an artillery smoke screen to obscure the area

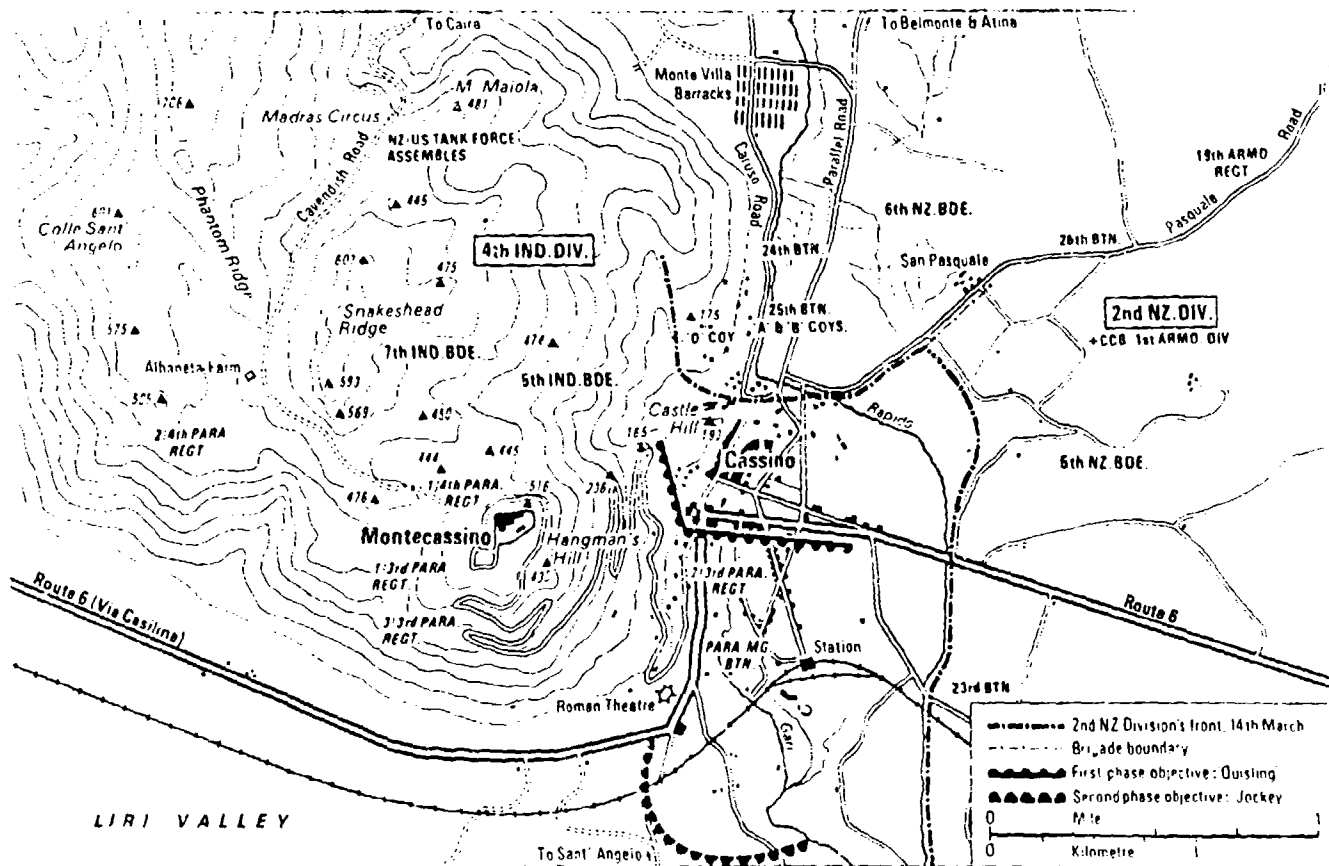
from enemy observation. This was continued throughout the day. At approximately 1500 hours the Germans launched a two pronged counterattack which was accompanied by two tanks moving in from the north. The smokescreen which earlier in the day had provided the New Zealanders protection was now used to advantage by the German counterattacking forces (72). Unable to offer effective resistance to the tanks, the New Zealanders suffered unanticipated losses and retreated across the Rapido river at about 1600 hour on the 18th of February (73).

RESULTS/CONCLUSION

The net results of these attacks were tenuous footholds at the base of point 593 and the forward slope of the ridge line formed by points 450 to 445, and a bridge over the Rapido. The cost in lives had been high. The second battle took its toll on the allies, but even more devastating were the effects of weather. Forward units in inadequate shelters suffered from the harsh wet winter weather. Front-line units endured about 60 casualties per day, most due to severe exposure or exhaustion. Criticism has been leveled that these actions failed because they were attempted in piecemeal fashion. While this has some validity in view of the fact that the 4th Division made its initial attacks with first one company and then one battalion, in view of the circumstances existing at the time, it is doubtful that this criticism is totally fair. The 2nd New Zealand Corps had not wanted to attack before the night of 16 February 1944,

which would have enabled the 4th Division adequate time to build its supply base so that it could launch a proper attack. Pressure from above, the insistence for action to relieve the pressure at Anzio, the "premature and uncoordinated" bombing of the monastery on the 15th, the flooding of the valley by the Germans, the weather and terrain all bore on the necessity of timing of the attacks and the decision to attack along narrow axes. Taking all things into consideration, there does not appear to have been much alternative to the attempts at penetration made by the 2nd New Zealand Corps. The further significance of these battles is their dramatic illustration that under proper conditions and with proper preparation, the advantages which mechanization, motorization and air power bring to a force can be negated. In such circumstances, the most elementary weapon, the soldier and his rifle, is still of significant import (74). The necessity for air/ground coordination and the importance of engineers to the success of a combined arms operations are patently obvious.

THE THIRD BATTLE



Map 6 (75)

THE THIRD BATTLE

(15-23 March 1944)

The second battle of Cassino (AVENGER, 15 to 18 February 1944) and the third battle (DICKENS, 15 to 23 March 1944) are sometimes regarded as a single battle with two assault phases. The third battle was fought over the same ground in similar weather and by the same allied fighters as was the second. (See Map 6--The Third Battle). The German forces changed; the 1st Parachute Division replacing the depleted 90th Panzer Grenadiers at the end of the second battle. While the second battle had begun with aerial pounding of the monastery, the third began with aerial bombardment of the town of Cassino. The Third battle was more oriented on the town of Cassino than on the hill mass with the monastery.

The weeks between the second and third battles were a time of attrition with the Germans receiving almost continual pounding by artillery and air and the allies taking daily losses from trenchfoot and exposure. During the pause between attacks, the continual pounding by artillery and air made the Cassino battlefield look like a World War I no-mans land between the trenches (76).

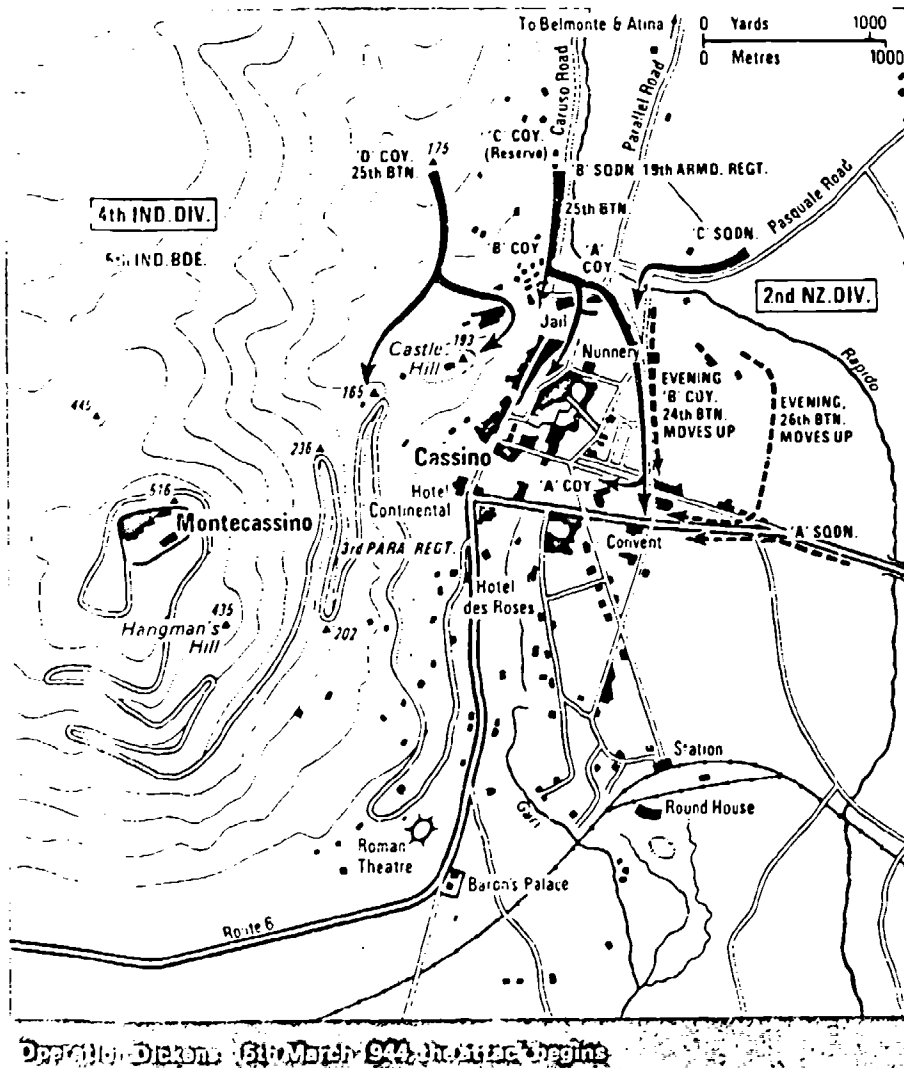
The plan for the 3d Battle of Cassino was approved by General Alexander very soon after the failure of the 2d

Battle for Cassino. Strategically, not much was changed between the two battles. The mission remained the same--to ease pressure on the Anzio bridgehead by diverting German troops to Cassino. The same political pressures were still being used to force the issue. The combined Chiefs insisted that the pressure against Anzio must be relieved; Churchill was adamant that the American and Russian allies should see that the Italian campaign had not deteriorated into an ineffective battle of attrition. And, of course--Rome was still a valued prize (77).

General Freyberg's corps had been mauled in the second battle and he was determined to ensure that the third battle was not going to be a replay. Faced with the same problems he had during the first battle--the horrendous weather, the inexperienced staff, the impregnable obstacles and unfriendly terrain that offered limited offensive option--he began planning the 3d Battle for Cassino (78).

The general concept of the battle was to withdraw the allied troops to a 1,000 meter safety line and then to use 500 medium bombers to provide three and one half hours of saturation bombardment of the town of Cassino itself. The New Zealand Division would push past the southern face of Monte Cassino along Route 6. (See Map 7--The Town of Cassino).

THE TOWN OF CASSINO



Map 7 (80)

The Indian Division would link up with the New Zealand Division northwest of the monastery and complete the encirclement. If successful, this course of action would give the allies a large bridge head over the Rapido River and an entry into the Liri Valley (79).

The 2d Battle ended on 18 Feb 1944. The 3d Battle plan was approved on 20 Feb 1944. There were many pressures on the allied Generals who were involved in the planning and time was considered to be a commodity in short supply. Consequently, it is not surprising to find the approved plan was one which could be put into effect quickly. The plan again relied heavily on the Strategic Air Forces' untested ability to saturate a small target area (1400 by 400 meters). General Freyberg hoped that such a bombardment would limit casualties within his New Zealand Corps; he was still painfully aware of the effect of heavy casualties on his tiny nation. The overall dependence on the Air Forces to remove the defenses of Cassino and demoralize the enemy was the same as it had been for the 2d Battle--a dependence that proved to be overly optimistic (81).

On the German side of Monte Cassino some changes in the units occurred but the mission remained the same--defend at all costs. Field Marshall Kesselring chose General Heidrich's 1st Parachute Division to relieve the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division which had suffered severely and was urgently in need of rest. General Baade's 90th Division was relieved and three Parachute Brigades took over the Cassino

town, Monastery Hill and Point 593, the Calvary Mount. 15th Panzer Grenadier Division remained in occupation of the Rapido sector while the 71st Infantry Division was to be used as a piecemeal reserve (82). The elite soldiers reflected the cocky, aggressive attitude of their commander, Lt Gen Richard Heidrich. He set high standards and drove his men hard. Heidrich conveyed to his soldiers a possessive attitude about Cassino and also an attitude of aggressiveness and calm under pressure. The other German units involved were of similar mettle.

As previously stated, the plan for the 3d Battle (Operation DICKENS) was approved on 20 February 1944, with a planned execution date of 24 February 1944. It is hard to believe but the weather, already terrible, got significantly worse before the 24th of February so the operation was postponed. Without favorable weather, any plan which depended on the Air Force for victory was doomed. The weather in February and early March was so bad all aircraft were grounded (83).

THE BATTLE

The third battle began as planned, albeit much later than the original plan had called for. General Freyberg, relieved of the need to attack, at any cost, prepared plans which called for at least three successive days without rain (84). It took until the 7th of March before this criterion

was met, but the airfields were so soggy that it was the 15th before the bombers could take off. During the weeks between the second battle and the third battle, the artillery, less hampered than the air force by rain and snow, had continued to pound the Germans on Cassino (85)

When the weather cleared sufficiently, the Air Forces bombed the town of Cassino from 0830 to 1200 hours on 15 March 1944. During this preplanned strategic bomber strike, 1,184 tons of bombs were dropped on the town of Cassino, into an area nominally 1,400 by 400 meters. Only about half of the bombs actually hit the target area, but they were sufficient to ensure that no buildings were left standing (although the rubble and broken wall still provided excellent cover and concealment for the Germans). Many of the bombs which missed the town of Cassino fell nearby (some on allied gun positions), but one group of bombers actually bombed the wrong town (Venafrò) -- about ten miles from Cassino (86) Following the bomber strike, fighter bombers were on call during the afternoon (87).

After the bombing attack, the 6th Brigade (New Zealand) advanced, as per plan, on the north side of the town of Cassino behind artillery preparatory fires. The 25th Battalion, previously withdrawn a kilometer, led the way into the town and met fires just a few hundred meters beyond their earlier positions. (88) Meanwhile, the 5th Brigade (NZ) fired into the town from the left flank (southeast). The plan of the day called for the objective,

Castle Hill (point 193), to be taken during the first phase of the operation ("Quisling"). This first phase was to be completed by 1400 hours, two hours after the completion of the bombing. (89) As 25 Battalion entered the town from the north, they encountered brisk fire from the ruins of the town, in particular from Castle Hill. The combination of rubble, smoke, and dust made observation extremely difficult, so the New Zealanders were unable to effectively silence the German marksmen with either direct or indirect fires. Adding further to the problems of the allies, their tanks were unable to follow the infantry due to the rubble in the streets, a problem about which Colonel Mack of the XII Air Support Command had warned General Freyberg (90) (91). Radio nets failed about 1300 hours and enemy snipers shot both messengers and wiremen, making communications virtually non-existent. The same enemy fires from the ruins and from positions on the hillside kept the engineers from coming forward to clear the rubble which blocked tanks and slowed the infantry. Because reinforcements were slow to arrive and because of the poor communications, the allies were unable to seize the Point 435 (Hangman's Hill) defenses. The battle for the town of Cassino bogged down into house by house (actually rubble mass by rubble mass) clearing of the town. This battle became a matter of platoon and squad operations with ineffective communications. It seemed that the Germans reinfiltreated as fast as the ruin was cleared (92).

The real need in Cassino was for more troops to clear ruins and prevent reoccupation. Urban fighting is a manpower intensive operation. The reinforcements were not forthcoming and most of the squads and platoons withdrew by midnight. Of course, the aerial bombardment had succeeded in so pounding the roads that the tanks were unable to even get close to the town for an hour after the infantry had invested it. In street fighting, the tank-infantry team was found to be decisive, but the rubble in Cassino kept the tanks from getting close enough to the infantry to be helpful (93).

The story of the street fighting in Cassino is a collection of tales of small unit heroism and inability to communicate with higher headquarters. The first phase of the attack had as its objective the capture of the Castle Hill. By 1645, the castle fort was in the hands of D Company, 25th Battalion, but they were unable to communicate their success and so were not relieved or reinforced, hence the attack progressed no further (94). These troops finally received assistance about midnight of the 15th when the 1st/4th Essex arrived. The Gurkhas arrived on the morning of the 16th and by early afternoon had taken a foothold on Hangman's Hill (Point 435) (95). The allies were never able to properly reinforce their hold on these outposts which were under almost continual counterattack by Heidrich's paratroopers.

Meanwhile, down in the town proper, the reserve battalion (the 26th) was not ordered to advance until 1725 hours on the 15th; they arrived in position in the middle of the night. By this time, the weather had closed in, producing an impenetrable darkness. The attack had to wait until dawn when it was quickly halted by the Germans who pinned the New Zealanders down all day on the 16th (96).

Where tanks were able to come forward, after heroic engineer effort, they provided valuable fire support to the infantry. Their armor protected radios proved to be even more valuable than their guns, for the infantry radios were almost worthless (97). House-to-house fighting continued all day on the 16th with the Germans looking and shooting down from fortified positions on the hillside and infiltrating the town. On the hill, point 236 was an important German fire base which was almost impossible to take and probably impossible to hold with the monastery overlooking it (98). The allies hoped to use their tanks to hit the open German eastern and southern flank to take the train station, clear the railway causeway, and bring more tanks to bear on the Germans. Unfortunately, extensive engineer effort was required to open the pitted and rubble approaches to the tanks. A well coordinated combined arms effort was required to protect the engineers while they cleared the way for further tanks and infantry advance, but the effort applied was anything but well coordinated (99).

Meanwhile, the aerial bombardment had succeeded in stopping the flow of supplies to the German forward areas during daylight hours. The Germans felt, however, that they were still able to move freely during the hour of darkness. Had the battle gone on for days, the German supply situation would have become critical. While the allied aircraft were able to continue interdiction of the lines of communications, raids during the evening of the 15th had kept the allied fighter-bombers off the German positions during a crucial period (100).

Since the allies seemed to have failed throughout the entire day of the 15th to take the first objective (they did not feel secure in having only a few troops in the castle), the original plans were superseded. Following a night of light combat, on 16 March the allies continued their assault on the hillside defenses. As mentioned above, the 1st and 9th Gurkhas finally secured Hangman's Hill by early evening of the 16th. The allies found it impossible to completely secure the town and hillside without tank support but tanks were not able to cross the river without engineer support. The engineers were, as mentioned, hampered by enemy fire called in from hidden and reveted observation posts in the hills (101).

General Freyberg was convinced that the key to the capture of Cassino was the town and not the monastery. On the night of the 16th, the allies tried, without success, to use their tanks to support the infantry. The real allied

failure, though, was to continue trying to clear the town with only three battalions; Freyberg thought that he had enough troops in the small area and refused to throw in additional troops for street-to-street fighting. He used his tanks around the periphery of the town where the ground was more open (102).

The allies continued grueling peripheral tactics around the edge of the town throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth. Both sides took heavy losses, but the allies withdrew damaged units while the German paratroopers reinforced with individual replacements. Heidrich would not allow his units to be replaced; in particular, he insisted that his units remain commanded by paratroopers, even when the units had suffered grievous casualties (103).

By the 19th of March, the allies finally had enough tanks across the river to try an assault on the monastery, by this time finally recognized as essential to the winning the the battle. Due to the mud and rubble, the tanks did not prove to be as valuable as the allies had hoped, for they were unable to accompany the infantry as closely as desired. Meanwhile, the Germans had infiltrated troops into the town of Cassino and were able to launch a counterattack of their own on the 19th. The Germans caught the allies at the castle just before they were to attack uphill toward the monastery. Viscious seige fighting occupied the small German and allied units involved. The Germans had the allies pinned down in the castle but were themselves pinned

by tank fire from the edge of town and by artillery and mortar fire (104).

The German counterattack failed, but it had blunted the allied attack on the monastery. In the northwest, the allies had prepared a tank thrust up Cavendish road, Operation REVENGE, which was scheduled to hit the rear of the monastery just before the Gurkhas and the Essex arrived at the main gate. Operation REVENGE was launched on schedule in the hope that the German counterattack in the east would have taken all German efforts. Operation REVENGE was commanded by a British artillery colonel without tank experience; it was, further, a pure tank operation without accompanying infantry. The tanks proceeded up the road slowly and with quite a bit of confusion as to what they were doing. The German 2d/4th Parachute Regiment saw them coming and was ready for them. The assault failed with 14 tanks destroyed or abandoned. From that time on, the Germans enhanced their tank defenses and tank operations became much more difficult (105).

The 19th was a bad day for the allies. In the first place, their infantry attack on the monastery had been spoiled by a German counter attack. Second, their armor attack, Operation REVENGE, had been repulsed with great losses. Further, it had become clear that the positions which they held were indefensible, since they were not mutually supporting. The most critical of these positions was the castle, which the 5th Indian Brigade declared could

not be held if it continued to be surrounded by Germans in dug-in positions on the lower slopes. The loss of the castle would, it was believed by both sides, make holding the town impossible. Finally, the allies were changing their collective mind as to whether the town of Cassino were adequate to launch an exploitation, even if the allies continued to hold on to every bit of ground (106).

Fighting occurred around the castle for the next two days as the allies attempted to clear German positions and the Germans resisted and counterattacked. Perhaps the greatest killer of Germans were the main guns of the tanks which pounded the German positions with direct fire from the 20th on. However, by the evening of the 23d, the allies had decided that the New Zealand Corps should stand firm without further attacks until it could be relieved by the XIII Corps of Eighth army (107).

By the 24th of March, the allied defenders along the hillside were withdrawn and the allied assault was over. The evacuation of Hangman's Hill was achieved without any allied casualties. The allies dug in in the town of Cassino and continued to pound the German positions with tank and indirect fire weapons so effectively that the Germans did not even realize until the 27th that the allies had evacuated (108).

RESULTS / CONCLUSIONS

The German parachute division had fought valiantly and had taken heavy casualties. The allies, had they had troops to attack again, might have been able to defeat the Germans, but Alexander had decided to recover, for the allies had also fought valiantly and had taken heavy losses (109).

By the end of the third battle both divisions of the New Zealand Corps were completely exhausted. Six battalions had suffered excessive casualties while the Corps as a whole lost over 2000 men killed, wounded, or missing. German defensive strength, hostile terrain, and winter weather proved devastating for the condition and morale of the New Zealand Corps and it was replaced in the line by the 2 Polish Corps.

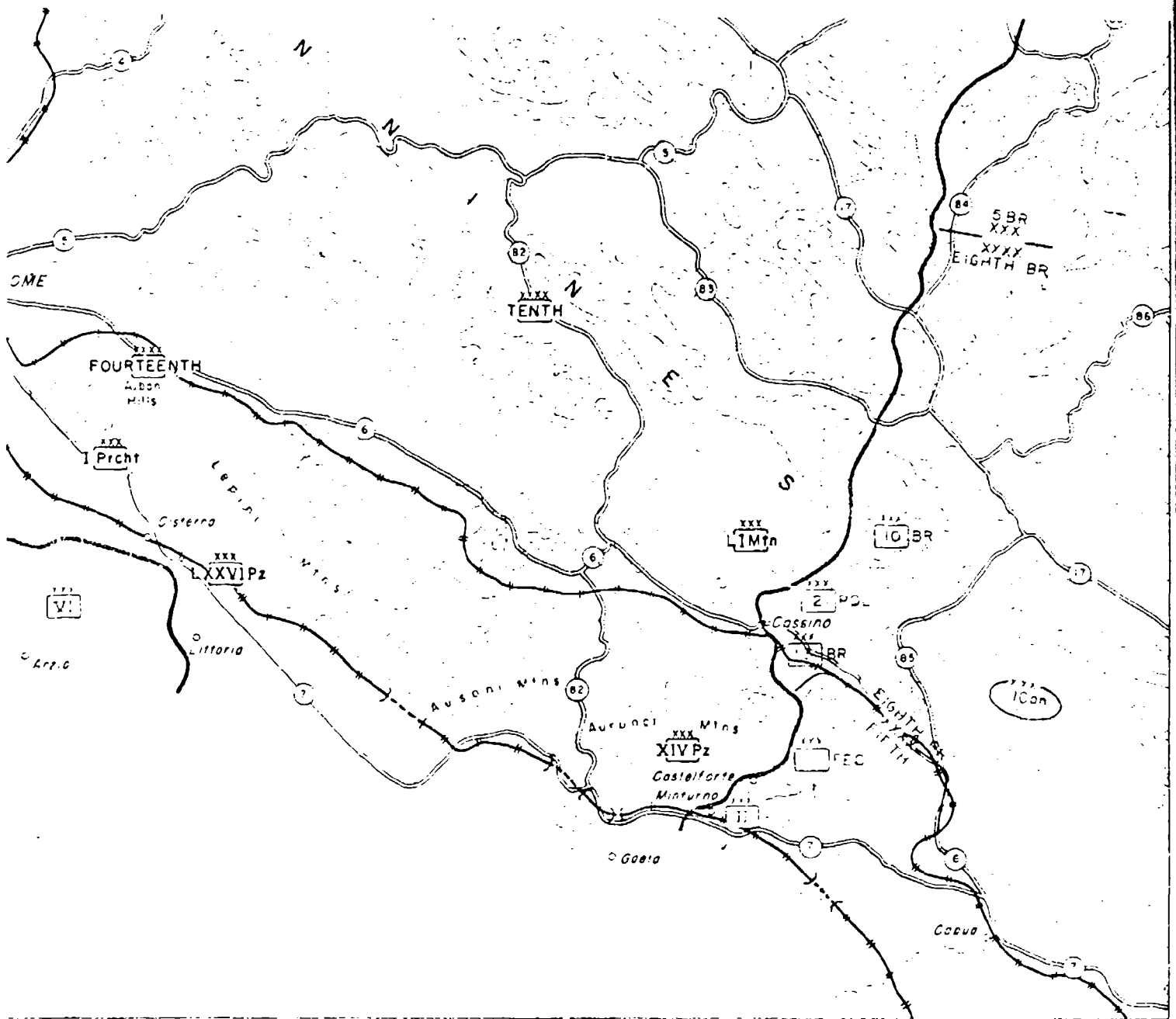
The Germans too had suffered significant casualties during the 2d and 3d battles. The four battalions of the regiment holding Cassino had been reduced to a strength of about two platoons each. The division reserve, a battalion from 1st Parachute Regiment, was so exhausted that it could not retake Hangman's Hill from the Gurkhas.

The allies had captured a bridgehead, but they did not use it again. They held part of the town of Cassino but were unable to capture the rest. When the allies finally broke through the Gustav line, it was from the old X Corps bridgehead that the successful assault was finally launched, not from the Cassino bridgehead. All that the third battle of Cassino accomplished was a battle of attrition. In this, it was successful, for it did destroy German units and cause

the Germans to send additional units into Italy. That it also wasted allied strength may be beside the point, for the allies had more men and materiel than the Germans (110).

During this battle, the allies never pressed any advantages in the town where they became bogged down in street fighting. However, given the confused aims of the battle and the desire that New Zealand casualties been kept low, the battle was fought well. Given that the real strategic purpose of the battle was to tie down German troops, the third battle of Cassino accomplished its purpose (111).

THE FOURTH BATTLE



Map B (112)

THE FOURTH BATTLE

The Fourth Battle of Cassino was very different from the first three battles. For one thing, the battle was conducted in mid-May 1944, when the weather had warmed up, (although the spring remained wet). A break in the rains during May significantly helped the allies. The hillside and rubble continued to be pounded by artillery and occasional air strikes and remained a morass of stone blocks and mud. As May dried out, however, the mud firmed up and the going got better(113).

Prior to the fourth battle of Cassino, the allies shifted the 5th and 8th Army sectors so that they were able at last to achieve a 3:1 numerical advantage in the Cassino area. Allied forces available on 11 May 1944, were as shown in Appendix 1.

Those units directly affecting the German positions at Cassino were the 2 Polish Corps (two divisions) from 8th Army, the XIII Corps (four divisions) from 8th Army and the French Expeditionary Corps (FEC) (four divisions) from 5th Army. (See Map 8). The allies were able to achieve numerical superiority on this narrow front by using the 5th British Corps in an economy-of-force defense in eastern Italy.

In this fourth battle for Monte Cassino the Polish 2d Corps commanded by General Anders would be the main actor.

So, although there were nominally ten divisions in the vicinity, only two divisions were really committed at Cassino. The Polish Corps staff spent as much time and effort as possible with their plan. General Freyberg gave them much useful advice-- hard lessons paid for with New Zealand and Indian Blood. Information gleaned from reconnaissance flights and observations from vantage points were all combined carefully to portray a more accurate picture of the main German dispositions than the allies had ever had(114). This picture, the Poles would find, was still incomplete.

German units opposing the allies were unchanged from the third battle. The battered 1st Parachute Division continued to take the brunt of the front line fighting at Cassino. Devastated units were rebuilt rather than replaced.

By the fourth battle, allied pressure at Anzio and German concern about a second amphibious assault left no German reserves available for commitment to the Cassino sector. However, replacements and recovered casualties increased unit strengths in the 10th and 14th Armies from 330,572 on 1 March to 365,616 on 1 May 1944. Although the 1st Parachute Division had received many replacements, at the beginning of the fourth battle, the allies had a decided numerical advantage (3:1) in the Cassino sector.

Operation DIADEM, the plan which included the 4th Battle of Cassino, had its the overall objective the capture

of Rome. The defeat of the German forces at Monte Cassino was but a part of the concentrated plan by General Alexander. The weather had changed from freezing and wet winter to mild spring, thus allowing the allies to exploit their superiority in weapons and supplies and to make maximum advantage of their air superiority. Another difference between this and the earlier battles was the amount and quality of the planning that went into the operation. General John Harding, Alexander's Chief of Staff, had a brilliant plan that for the first time was coordinated, complete and had the command backing to be supportable. For the first time, the allied staff work was professionally done. The final major difference was that a deception operation had been planned and was to be executed to perfection. Alexander's deception called for Kesselring to believe that another amphibious landing was both inevitable and imminent.

The allies conducted a massive deception plan called NUNTON to convince the Germans that they were preparing an amphibious operation in the area around Civita Vecchio. Indications were that the deception plan worked and the Germans were holding some of their reserves back in anticipation of an amphibious landing.

Certain aspects of Alexander's plans were deliberately allowed to fall into German agents' hands to accomplish this deception. The deception was successful, for Field Marshall Kesselring concluded that the landing would come in the La

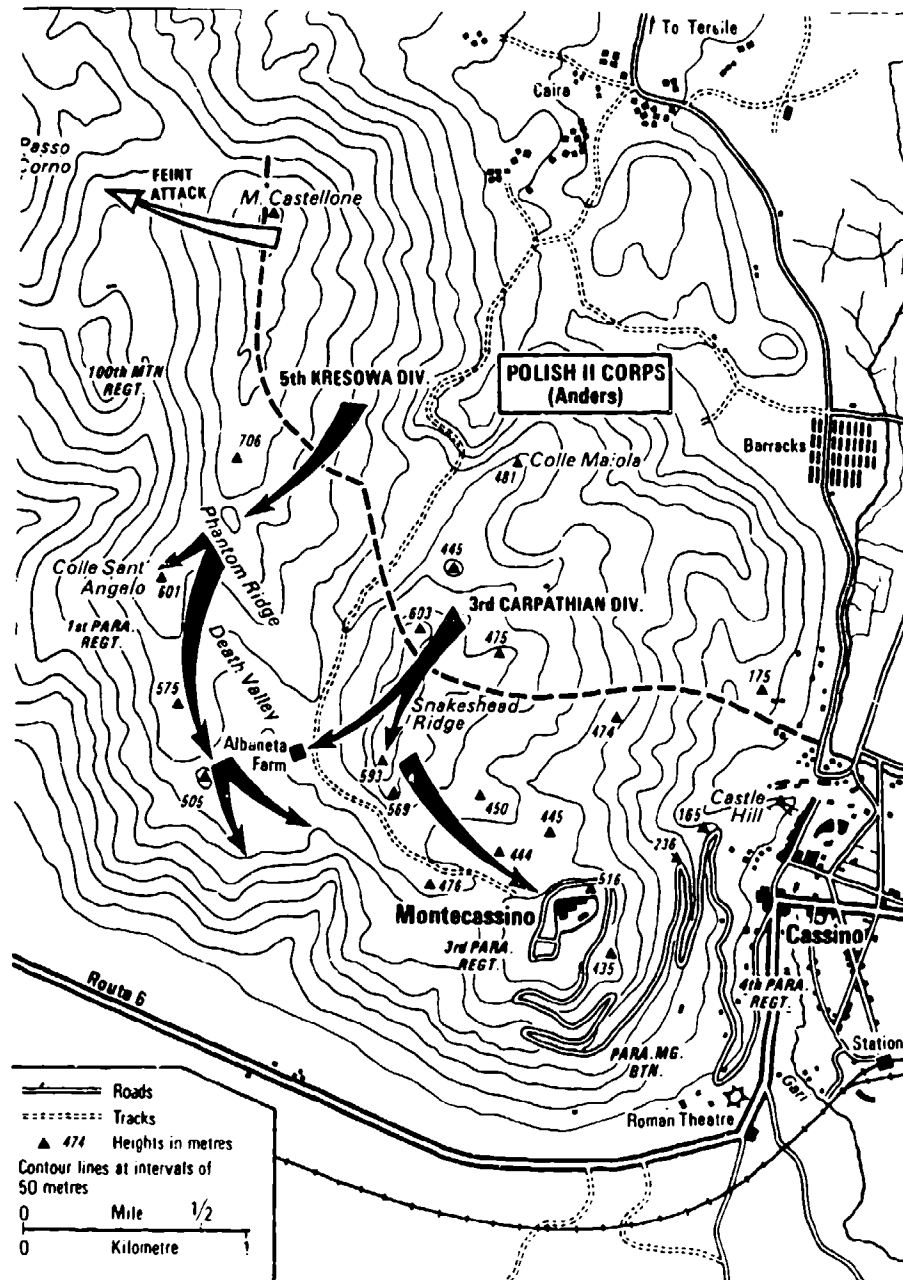
Spezia-Leghorn area and disposed his forces accordingly (115).

The allies also concealed the massive movement of troops associated with the shift of the 8th Army into the Cassino sector. The Germans believed there were six allied divisions in the area around Cassino when in fact there were ten.

The allies were also able to gain detailed and up-to-date information on German artillery positions and Nebelwerfer locations. Operation DIADEM began on 11 May 1944, with the Germans completely deceived as to the time, location, and strength of the attack.

There were four possible ways of attacking the Monastery Hill, any of which would exact a heavy toll of casualties. Three had been tried and had failed. General Anders and his staff believed that the fourth might bring the victory they sought (116).

ANDERS' PLAN OF ATTACK



Map 9 (117)

The course of action chosen by the 2nd Polish Corps for the fourth attack of Monte Cassino called for a broad front approach from the northeast. (See Map 9--Aners' Plan of Attack). The objectives were the same as the previous battles and would be defended by the same Paratroop Division commanded by General Heidrich. The Polish divisions planned to first seize Snakeshead Ridge and Colle Sant' Angelo. With these heights secured they would overlook Route 6 and so could threaten Heidrich's flank in the town of Cassino. The 4th Indian had made such an attempt in the second battle but faced a different force ratio and had attacked under much more severe weather conditions. Assisting in the plan the British 13 Corps would be making its major assault across the Rapido to threaten the town from the West. Throughout the planning and concentration of forces the greatest secrecy and best camouflage was used to add to the deception plan General Alexander had designed (118).

THE BATTLE

On the 11th of May 1944, the German defenses at Cassino were still held by Heidrich's men, well dug in within their dugouts on the hillsides and amid the ruins of monastery and town. These Germans had a significant advantage over the newly arrived Polish of holding ground which had become familiar to them during the long winter. The 100th Mountain Regiment held the area around Castellone and the Colle Sant' Angelo. The 3d Parachute Regiment held Monte Cassino and

the adjacent high ground and the 4th Parachute Regiment held the town of Cassino. Additional German parachute units were in reserve positions along the reverse slope from Villa Santa Lucia to the monastery (119).

The question for the Germans was not whether they could hold out but rather for how long could they hold their positions in the face of a deteriorating strategic situation. The German objective was to hold on until Bode's Army Group could disengage and withdraw to the Fuhrer Line. The key would be the success of their defense of the Liri Valley (120).

German intelligence about the allies was scarce and provided them no help in determining allied intentions. The allied deception plan worked masterfully at both strategic and operational levels. For example, the German forces did not know where the French forces were located or their strength and were unable to discover the strength of the Polish units or be positive of their exact positions (121).

Field Marshall Kesselring, foxed by the allied deception plan, was so afraid of possible landings in his rear that he concentrated his mobile divisions near the coast in anticipation of the fabricated allied landings. The German's lack of knowledge of allied intentions was so bad that the Germans foresaw no immediate attack; indeed, Kesselring and several of his senior commanders were on leave when the allied attacks were launched on 12 May 1944 (122).

In anticipation of the final assault on Cassino, the Allied 15th Army Group had been reorganized. The Polish Corps had been brought forward to relieve the British 78th Division north of the monastery. The British 4th and 8th Divisions were preparing to assault across the Rapido River at Colle Sant' Angelo with the British 78th Division and 6th Division to follow (123).

The allied plan was for the Polish and British forces to conduct a pincer with a link-up at Piedmonte on Route 6. The Canadian 5th and 1st Divisions were available for pursuit up the Liri Valley once the Germans were forced to leave Cassino. The French were to make surprise penetrations of the mountains in order to separate the German XIV Panzer Corps from the German Mountain Corps. The French would then link up with the Canadians in the Liri Valley. The only US participation in the final assault would be that the 36th, 85th and 88th Divisions were available to advance astride Route 7, far to the west of Cassino, if needed (124).

The plan called for the British to break through in the Liri Valley, the US and French to threaten the German flanks along Route 6 and 7, and the Poles to drive the German parachutists from the Cassino massif. The expulsion of the Germans from Cassino would make the German positions in the valley untenable and so clear the way for the other advances. With the Germans falling back, the Poles would

advance, link up with the British forces at Route 6, and continue to advance northwards (125).

The Polish Corps, under the command of General Anders, would advance along the Monte Castellone feature to the pass at the head of the re-entrant between Albaneta and Villa Sant' Angelo. Simultaneously with this advance, the Poles would attack Point 593 and Albaneta and advance down the ridge by way of point 569 and point 476 to take the rubble monastery. The Kresowa Division would seize Colle Sant' Angelo and the Carpathian Division would seize the other objectives (126).

General Anders saw that the key to his success would be to engage as many mutually supporting German positions as possible at one time, denying the Germans the benefit of their mutual support. Anders planned to then rush reinforcements forward to catch German counterattack forces trying to retake defensive positions.

The first Polish assault was conducted on the night of 11 May 1944, and the following day. The initial attack failed to seize the objectives. This was partially due to the Pole's unfamiliarity with the terrain, partially due to their encountering a minefield, and largely due to their encountering twice as many Germans as intelligence had led them to believe were there. The Germans, heavily supported with artillery, were successful in counterattacking. Further contributing to the Polish repulse, the Polish artillery did not support the ground troops as well as

desired, communications broke down, and numerous technical difficulties were encountered (127).

The Polish Corps was ordered to hold in place, harass the Germans with artillery fire, and improve their knowledge of their positions and the terrain. The Poles would wait for the British to make progress in the Liri Valley before they attacked a second time. The second attack of the fourth battle was mounted on 16 May by the Poles (128).

The German defenders had been weakened by the first Polish attack (and, of course, by five months fighting). Further, the Germans had moved some of their forces from Cassino into the Liri Valley to counter the British advance. Advancing against the reduced German defenses, elements of the Polish Kresowa Division met with success and took the Colle Sant' Angelo defenses. The Germans counterattacked but were stopped by Polish combined arms teams, for the Poles had tanks with their infantry and the Germans had none (129).

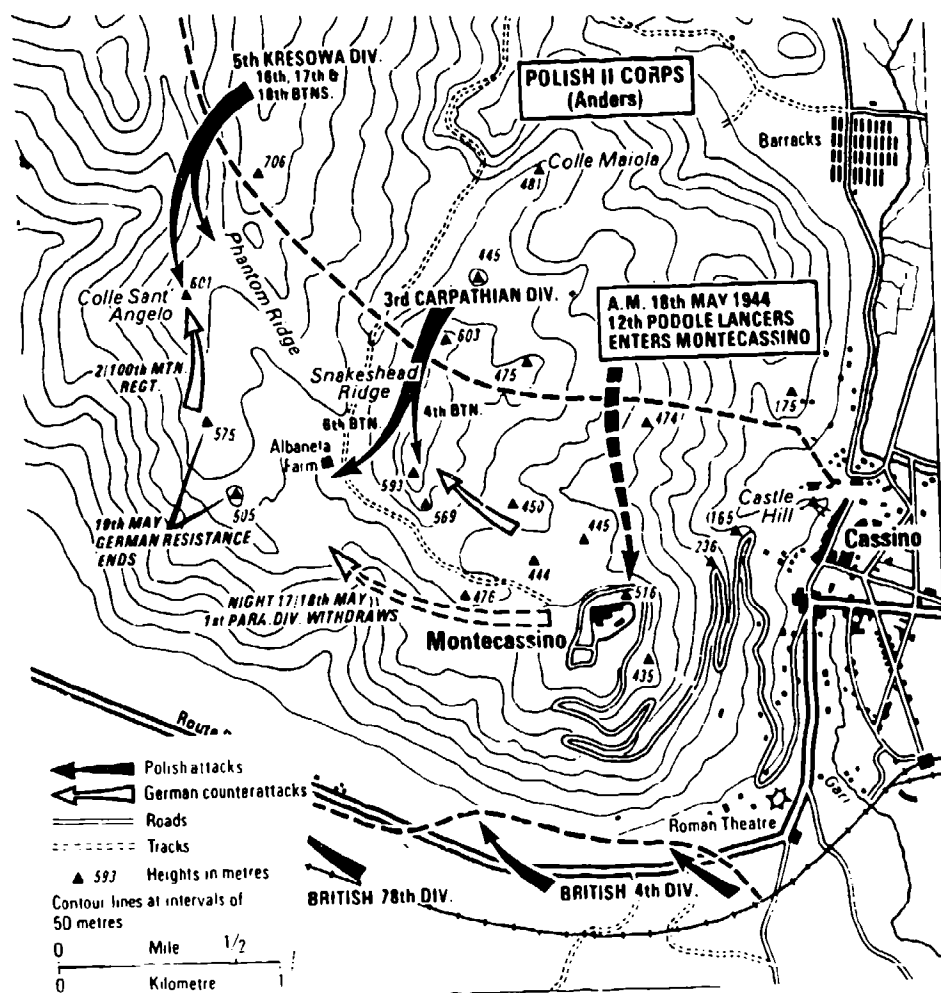
The Polish Carpathian Division penetrated the mine field in front of Albaneta and took point 593 between Monte Cassino and Albaneta. After seizing point 593, they could not advance further because of fire from points 505 and 575.

Despite severe losses and being considerably outnumbered during the fourth battle, elements of the 1st Parachute Division withdrew from Cassino and the monastery only when these positions became untenable as a result of allied successes in the Liri Valley.

By the night of 17 May, the Poles had control of Colle Sant' Angelo, Albaneta, and point 593. On the morning of 18 May, elements of the Carpathian Division seized Monte Cassino, after the withdrawal of most of the German forces there. It was not until the next day, 19 May, that the last German Parachute elements on points 575 and 505 surrendered.

On 20 May, Polish forces moved to link up with the British forces at Piedimonte along Route 6 and the Battle of Cassino was over.

THE CAPTURE OF CASSINO



Map 10 (117)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION

The significance of the Battle of Cassino must be assessed in tactical, operational, and strategic terms. The fact that there were four battles (assaults) and two attrition efforts spread over five months clouds the issue at the strategic and operational levels. What began as an assault to support and link up with the Anzio landing forces became an end in itself. What should have been a simple capture of a mountain became a key psychological step on the road to Rome.

Tactically, the battle was a decisive victory for the allies, for the Germans were expelled from the Gustav Line and the road to Rome was opened. Operationally, the battle could have been decisive. The allies might well have driven the Germans up the Italian peninsula and ended the Italian campaign. However, the victory at Cassino was not exploited and the operation accomplished little. At the level of grand strategy (or "vision"), Cassino appears to have been almost meaningless. It was but a sideshow to the carnage taking place on the Russian Front and the massive preparations for Operation OVERLORD. Yet, there is a counter argument, for it may be that without a victory at Cassino, the allies may not have been willing to launch OVERLORD.

How can anyone doubt that Cassino was an allied victory? After all, the allies expelled the Germans from the town and heights. The Gustav Line was defeated. The German flank was turned. The Road to Rome was open. These are clear measures of success in battle. They are, however, only measures of tactical victory, for tactical victory only contributes to strategic victory when the strategic goals of the victor are served. The real question is whether the strategic goals of the allies or the Germans were better served by the battle of Cassino.

Strategically, the Germans knew what they wanted--they wanted to keep the allies out of Germany. Operationally, they wanted to slow the allied drive up the Italian Peninsula as much as possible. The General Staff had, by this time, no illusions of defeating the allies; even Kesselring had but little hope of even stopping them from taking Italy. The Germans wanted to hold the allies as long as possible and tie down as many allied troops with as few German troops as could be managed. Kesselring started with the goal of slowing the allies and he retained that goal until the end. He succeeded. The Germans held the allies at the foot of Monte Cassino for five months. In the end, the Germans lost the battle of Cassino and lost the war, but the allies never reached Germany through Italy. Therefore, operationally and, to an extent strategically, the Germans accomplished their goal at Cassino.

In contrast to the clear German goals, the allies were never really sure of what they wanted, either in Italy or at Cassino. At the Grand Strategy level, the allies were clear in their intention--they wanted Germany to surrender unconditionally. The allies, of course, won the war. The ultimate question is whether or not Cassino contributed to their strategic victory. It is upon the question of whether Italy was strategically significant that the question of the significance of Cassino founders.

Prime Minister Churchill wanted the allied forces to drive north through Italy into the "soft underbelly of Europe" while the Americans wanted to attack through France. The Italian campaign may have been conducted for the political reason of keeping the British happy, but it was justified as opening a front to convince Stalin that the western allies were attacking and were not just letting Russian soldiers die while the west waited. This political indecision permeated the Italian campaign and made the question of strategy quite complicated.

The drive up the Italian boot was conducted almost as an economy of force operation. Political considerations aside, the allies were tying down good German forces in Italy, thus keeping them away from the Russian Front and eventually keeping them away from Normandy where the allies were planning their massive continental invasion. When the drive up the Italian peninsula stalled at Cassino, the

allies believed that it was necessary to advance further so as to draw in and tie down more Germans.

Cassino became a fixation for both sides. To Hitler, it was an area where his direction of "yield no ground" was being followed. To the allies, it was a place where their drive north was held up. The allies had a pressing desire to take Rome. In the end, they took Rome, but history has never answered the question of whether the political goal of taking Rome was decisive in the war. The question still looms of whether the advance up the Italian boot was meaningful.

Politically, the victory at Cassino and the capture of Rome only partially pacified the British. Churchill favored the advance up the Italian peninsula and the Combined Chiefs poured blood and treasure into the advance. The glory of the Empire was served with the blood of British, New Zealander, Indian, and other soldiers. However, the victory at Cassino was not exploited, for men and equipment were quickly withdrawn from Italy for the ANVIL advance into southern France. From the allied viewpoint (largely an American viewpoint), Cassino had served its purpose.

The battle of Cassino (and the entire Italian campaign) had held German forces in Italy, thereby diverting them from Normandy and the Russian front (as a footnote, the fighting at Cassino did help preserve the Anzio beachhead). The campaign had held open an active front to show Stalin that the allies were fighting rather than merely waiting for the

Russians to bleed the Germans to death. Finally, as mentioned before, the campaign mollified the British and gave them a theater in which they were supreme.

The question of the value of Cassino is whether it was cost effective. At the numbers level of analysis, the battle killed 2900 Germans versus 2100 allied troops. On the other hand, it held down only two German divisions at the cost of ten allied divisions. Had the allied divisions been needed elsewhere, the battle would have been a net loss to the allies. Since they were not immediately needed on other fronts (while the Germans were very much needed), the question of the effectiveness of Cassino must be answered in the affirmative. Cassino was a cost effective (but bloody) investment for the allies.

However, the allies lost the opportunity for pursuit and annihilation which followed Cassino. By withdrawing troops for ANVIL, they failed to capitalize on their investment. Obviously, the Combined Chiefs (in contrast to Churchill) believed that Cassino had served its purpose; the question remains as to whether it helped either side achieve its strategic objectives.

The shallow answer is that the battle of Cassino did not help either side. The Italian Theater was of little significance to either side. For the Germans, Italy had ceased to be an ally and had become an occupied country. The Germans had to hold the allies away from their southern flank with an economy of force operation. For the allies

(divided in coalition warfare), Italy was a sideshow. The US had no intention of putting enough forces into Italy for it to be decisive. They saw Churchill as chasing a wild goose on the Italian peninsula. In the allied coalition, it was the Americans who had the trump cards, and the desires of the British were of less impact than those of the Americans.

Seen in this narrow view, the battle of Cassino might be considered to be worthy of little study, famous solely because of the loss of life and the destruction of the monastery. It may also be seen as an example of how not to run coalition warfare--one of the reasons for the failure of the allies was that they pulled troops of one nation out of the line and replaced them with strangers from another nation.

In contrast to the narrow ("it was meaningless") view, some believe that the battle was primarily useful to the Germans. After all, they did hold the allies on the Gustav Line for five months. Others argue that the battle was more valuable to the allies, for the battle provided training to allied troops and staffs and, had the war gone differently, it provided a potential opening in the German lines which could have been exploited. The fact that the success was not exploited is seen as merely one of the fortunes of war.

Given that the Germans lost and the allies did not exploit the battle, were any lessons learned from Cassino? In the short term, few lessons seem to have been learned.

The allies waited until after the war to publish battle books on mountain warfare which exploited Cassino's lessons. Subsequent fighting in mountains during the war showed that the allies did not gain much from the battle. Coalition warfare may have profited from the lessons learned, but similar problems plagued the allied commanders until the end of the war.

In the long term, Cassino may offer some lessons to the soldier of today. The Germans showed that a well dug-in light force can hold a heavily armored force. At Cassino, the Germans exploited the terrain to take away from the allies the advantage of mechanization. Cassino displayed some of the limits of armored and mechanized warfare; the rubbing effect of bombs made mechanized advance through the town almost impossible. Although today we can use the lessons of Cassino to remove the advantages of mechanization from the enemy in southern Germany, the allies had little opportunity to exploit this lesson in the Second World War (if they even recognized the lesson, which is doubtful).

More than anything else, Cassino revealed the futility of mass bombardment against dug-in forces. Bombardment was ineffective when it was not followed up by immediate assault; it had a shock effect but did not serve to help the ground forces gain ground. Alas, nobody seemed to pay any attention to this lesson during the war. The Army Air Force continued to preach the value of bombardment throughout the end of the war. Following the Second World War, nuclear

bombardment was long put forth as a sure way to defeat the enemy. Today we are willing to point to Cassino as an air power failure; the warriors of the time were not.

The battle of Cassino is useful as an example of how valuable a good deception plan can be. The first three assaults failed, in part, because the Germans knew fairly well what the allies were doing. The fourth assault was supported by a good deception plan and it succeeded. Although Cassino stands as an example of a good deception plan, it is difficult to say that the allies learned anything from the success of the action, for they were already using effective deception plans.

The battle of Cassino stands not only as an example of how things can be done, but also as an example of how things should not be done. The battle is an example of how the allied combatants lost sight of the principle of the objective. Accepting that the tactical commanders were not concerned with the strategic objectives of the Italian campaign, we still must fault them for losing sight of the tactical objective. The tactical objective should have been to open the road to Rome. This objective was later served by a breakthrough at a different point than Cassino. The local commanders, however, got so wrapped up in the battle that their objective became the destruction of the Germans holding Monte Cassino. They forgot that they wanted to open the road and remembered only how to kill the enemy.

This tactical fuzziness came because the allies were unsure of what their operational objective was. The Americans and British were never sure whether the operational objective was to tie down Germans (the American view) or to destroy Germans (the tactical commanders' apparent view) or to drive up Italy into Austria (the British view). Operational fuzzy mindedness led to tactical indecision.

The German units were elite units. These forces held well despite being in a no-win situation, normally a demoralizing affair. Today's Army is trying to build elite units, such as the Rangers or the Light Divisions, which will have esprit such as was shown by the German parachutists. Cassino showed how an integrated and coordinated defense can hold against great odds. As a current lesson, we may note that the Germans dug in for months but the next war in Europe may be fought not from Maginot line or Cassino type positions but from hastily prepared firing points.

Among the many lessons of Cassino is that delay in exploiting advantages (such as bombardment) will be paid for in blood in the next battle. We seem to have learned this lesson for we are training junior leaders to think for themselves and to exploit advantages. A similar lesson is that the confusion of battle makes the place of small unit leaders extremely important. We have an advantage in small unit leadership.

One of the failures of Cassino was the failure of leaders to come forward to where the fighting was taking place. Cassino showed that tactical operations cannot be effectively run from the rear and that the commanders must go forward to know what their troops are facing.

The differing replacement systems used at Cassino had significant impact on force effectiveness. The Germans sent troops into Cassino as individuals and small units; these people had the advantage of learning from those who were already there. Allied coalition warfare, however, made individual replacements difficult, so the allies replaced entire divisions with divisions from other countries. We will fight a coalition war in Europe and should remember the lessons of Cassino.

In the end, the principles of war continue to apply. At Cassino, the allies lost sight of the Objective and spent months fighting attrition warfare to take a hill that they could possibly have bypassed. We must remember Cassino and try to not get trapped into forgetting the principles of war.

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APPENDIX 1

STRATEGIC FORCES AVAILABLE

Prior to the second battle the following forces were available to the Allied 5th Army and the German XIV Panzer Corps:

ALLIED:

- New Zealand Corps
 - 2d New Zealand Division
 - 4th Indian Division
- French Expeditionary Corps
 - 3d Algerian Division
 - 2d Moroccan Division
 - 4th Moroccan Mountain Division

GERMAN:

- XIV Panzer Corps
 - 90 Panzer Grenadier Division
 - 15 Panzer Grenadier Division
 - 44 Hoch und Deutschmeister Infantry Division
 - 5 Mountain Division

Forces available for the third battle were:

ALLIED:

- New Zealand Corps
 - 2d New Zealand Division
 - 4th Indian Division
 - 78th British Division (reserve; committed into town of Cassino near the end of the third battle)
 - Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division (US) (reserve)
- French Expeditionary Corps
 - 3d Algerian Division
 - 2d Moroccan Division
 - 4th Moroccan Mountain Division

GERMAN:

- XIV Panzer Corps
 - 1st Parachute Division
 - 15 Panzer Grenadier Division
 - 44 Hoch und Deutschmeister Infantry Division
 - 5th Mountain Division

Before the fourth battle of Cassino, the allies shifted the 5th and 8th Army sectors so that they were able at least to achieve a three to one numerical advantage in the Cassino area. Allied forces available on 11 May 1944, were:

ALLIED:

15th Army Group

5th Army

- French Expeditionary Corps
 - 1st Motorized Infantry Division
 - 2d Moroccan Division
 - 3d Algerian Division
 - 4th Moroccan Mountain Division
- II Corps (US)
 - 85th Infantry Division
 - 88th Infantry Division

8th Army

- 2 Polish Corps
 - 5th Kresowa Division
 - 3d Carpathian Division
- XIII Corps (BR)
 - 6th Armoured Division
 - 4th British Division
 - 78th British Division
 - 8th Indian Division
- X Corps
 - New Zealand Division
 - 2 Parachute Brigade
- I Canadian Corps (Army reserve)
 - 1 Infantry Division
 - 5 Armoured Division

GERMAN:

- LI Mountain Corps
 - 1st Parachute Division
 - 44 Hoch und Deutschmeister Infantry Division
 - 5th Mountain Division
 - 144th Jaeger Division
- XIV Panzer Corps

71st Infantry Division
94th Infantry Division
Kampfgruppe (one regiment from 305th Infantry
Division and one regiment from 15th Panzer
Grenadier Division)

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